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# WOMEN IN ANCIENT INDIA

## MORAL AND LITERARY STUDIES

BY

CLARISSE BADER

Paris Asiatic Society

TRANSLATED BY

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# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*The original French version of this work was first published in 1867, and was atonce awarded distinction by the French Academy. It was the first work on the subject and its most noteworthy feature was that it drew all its informations from the original sanskrit sources. As it will appear from the contents of the book, it is perhaps still the most comprehensive book on the subject and is marked by the sanity of judgement joined to the charming grace of sentiment of the authoress.*

*The present translation of this work, which was published in the year 1925 and soon went out of print. Ever since then there had been a persistent demand for it which pursuaded us to bring out its reprint under our scheme of publishing out-of-print and rare books. We hope that effort will be patronized by the readers as usual.*

*TO*

*MR. BENJAMIN DUPRAT*

*In dedicating the first of my feeble essays to the friend and scholar who led and guided me, with fatherly care, through the splendid range of Oriental Literature, I am joyfully discharging a debt of affectionate gratitude. It is a pleasure thus to render homage to one for a work which, without him, would perhaps have not been undertaken, and which, through him, has been accomplished.*

*CLARISSE BADER.*

# PREFACE

THIS modest work, the only one hitherto that has dealt with this subject and therefore been exposed to the terrible glare of publicity, was not intended to appear as a single volume, but as the key to an extended series embracing the rôle of woman throughout the entire period of Eastern antiquity.

To ascertain woman's position in primitive society from the ever-inspired record of the Chosen People and of the disciples of Christ; from the poetry of the Arabs still burning with desert fire; from the witness in stone of Egyptian and Assyrian monuments; from the classical books, the annals and odes of China; from the mysterious and famed masterpieces of India; from the sacred texts, history, and legends of the Persia of Zoroaster; from the Christian literature of Armenia; and from all the productions of ancient Eastern genius,[1] explained by the genius of the modern West: such was our object and so it is still. Numerous materials had already been collected for this task, but on investigating the Indian contribution, we were suddenly stopped short, struck down by the unexpected spectacle displayed before our eyes. In a sister nation, older than the Grecian yet retaining in a lively degree the first impressions and typical ideas of our Indo-Germanic race, we discovered literary riches whose existence, prior to Hellenic antiquity, had never been surmised.

First, echoes of a prehistoric age were found in hymns, admirably expressing the needs of the human soul; next, monuments of heroic ages in laws, embodying beautiful verses and eternal principles of justice and virtue, gigantic epics like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, abounding with moving and tragic episodes, covering vast ranges of philosophy and religious thought, with pure and touching sentiments, coming from honest and believing hearts, splendid descriptions of tropical nature; lastly, the productions of an age contemporary with

[1] This genius, according to the fine expression of an illustrious critic, "a été la source de toute religion et de toute poésie." See M. Villemain, *Littérature au moyen âge*, IV leçon.

that of Augustus, showing the influences of a civilized and refined court, namely, dramas of powerful influence, and elegiacs which might have been uttered by Tibullus—such were the marvels displayed before our eyes.

And Woman! It is she who inspires the greater part of these masterpieces expressing the highest point of moral beauty, and who illustrates by her conjugal love, both heroic and pure, a theme embellished by Hindus in such variety that the fundamental idea is often overlaid by the multiplicity of varying circumstances. To-day, thanks to scholars like Jones, Wilson, Colebrooke, Max Müller, Bopp, Lassen, Weber, and many others, Sanskrit literature has become nearly classical in England and Germany. In France, the works of our learned writers on Indian subjects, Eugène Burnouf, Langlois, Ad. Regnier, Foucaux, Pavie, Fauche, and the strong impulse given, in the Académie de Stanislas, by Baron Dumast, and by Émile Burnouf and Leupol, are preparing for popular reading the masterpieces evolved on the banks of the Indus and the Ganges. Is it not, then, a favourable moment for calling attention to a literature eminently moralistic? Greece and Rome, hitherto acknowledged the only sources of classical perfection, have dried up. Some writers, doubtless, faithful to the principles of truth, beauty, and goodness, will immortalize the France of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding the fact that a suspicion to the contrary has been making itself felt. It was believed that everything grand and good in the human soul had already found expression, and what one might venture to call realism meant painting mankind in his most unworthy colours. In picturing his infirmities and causing him to see his image reflected in impure waters, will mankind thus be strengthened, benefited and elevated for his struggles? No! It is far better to offer him even the standard of a chimerical ideal! For the endeavour to attain the Divine standard means less deception than the relegation to that of the brute creation!

Has not the time arrived, we repeat, to refresh ourselves from more life-giving and generous sources? And only India has the honour of affording such sources. There, a sense of duty dominating all affections, a feeling of respect for the family life, a love for one's neighbour, a charity, including even animals in its tender effusion, a spirit of sacrifice,

presenting a nearly Christian atmosphere,—such are the foundations of a literature, which aims, not only at charming the imagination, but in strengthening the heart, and for which art is truly an apostleship.

How admirably uniform is human nature! In finding again in the productions of an age pre-Homeric in a people separated by thousands of years from the parent stem, our sublimest ideas, our purest principles, our sweetest sentiments—what a denial of that forlorn maxim anticipated by the mocking scepticism of Montaigne and voiced by the sad doubt of Pascal:[1] "On ne voit presque rien de juste et d'injuste qui ne change de qualité en changeant de climat."

Such a literature, uniting the laughing grace and the pleasing philosophy of Greece and Rome with the sad reveries and spiritualism of the Germanic nations, appears called to the highest destiny and to the creating perhaps of a second Renaissance.

Doubtless, inspiration alone does not constitute genius; inspiration creates, but taste chooses. Doubtless a severe critic would often be right in reproaching the Indian poet with lack of proportion. And why? Man, dominated by the snowy peaks of the Himalayas; sheltered by the dark recesses of virgin forests, where Nature was expressed in exuberant growth; man, frightened by Nature's moods shown in sudden convulsions and again reassured on the recovery of her usual calmness and grandeur; man, thus subjected to many and varying influences, gave vent to exaggerated feelings, comparable to the vigorous sap bursting forth from the trees of the tropics.

But if a few blemishes stain the majestic monuments raised by the Gangetic muse, are there not many pages in which sublime thoughts are worthily expressed, and where perfect sobriety is joined to a happy exuberance of expression?

Because of this little explored mine of literature, our study of Indian womanhood took an unforeseen departure.[2] The

[1] Pascal's *Thoughts*, first part, paragraph vi. 8.

[2] M. Félix Nève has lately published some attractive studies on woman as portrayed in the Mahâbhârata, preceded by a very detailed analysis on the condition of Woman in Ancient India. We have had occasion to refer to this beautiful Mémoire in which the learned Indologist has inserted several translations from episodes contained in the great Sanskrit epic. If M. Nève had only included in his clever and brilliant remarks all the other periods contained in ancient Indian literature, we should not have dared to continue the subject.

feminine types, creations both new and original in Hindu poetical imagination, are of exquisite freshness and charming suavity. Such portraits, detached from their primitive frames by a cleverer hand than mine, would figure worthily by the side of those bequeathed to us by better known civilizations.

Alike attracted and captivated, we lingered long in this magnificent field of literature, instead of making, as expected, a merely superficial investigation. Six months of incessant research have thus resulted in this volume, destined to form part of a larger series.

Our intention is to combine two objects, each forming the counterpart of the other and both of extraordinary importance, for the description of woman's position in Ancient India involves also the description of the greatest beauty found in that poetry which must, one day, exercise great influence amongst us.

Where necessary we have made use of the wording of the original authors, that is to say—where a French version was wanting we borrowed from the publications of English, German, or Italian Orientalists. Should any Indologist deign to glance at this humble essay, may he pardon us for having weakened by re-translation the vivid colouring of the quotations and for the inexperience of our twenty-two years of age. Our plan is very simple. The religious rights of the individual prove the degree of his or her social importance, and we shall therefore seek first the part played by woman in the Hindu Pantheon and culture, from the time of Aryan symbolism to the materialistic age of Krishna and his worshippers

In describing woman under the different conditions of daughter, mother, and widow, we shall endeavour to trace the source of each type from the Vedic times, and by following its successive development through the ages and commenting on the various episodes drawn from the hymns and poems, we shall avoid the dullness of merely studying customs and laws taken by themselves. Her national character thus established, we shall further describe the part woman was permitted to play in the legendary times, which have come down to us in the mysterious tales contained in the Puranas; in the heroic periods, reflected in the Epics; and in the court of Malava and its customs, revealed to us in drama and in story.

May the numerous quotations which have been cited win a few more friends for the Oriental cause! May the Gangetic muse occupy her proper position on the domestic hearth, whose austere joys she has so worthily sung!

Finally, may women learn to appreciate through the translations of elegant interpreters, those poets who in ancient times knew them best and loved them most.

# TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

MLLE. BADER'S work, *La Femme dans l'Inde antique*, was published in 1867, and was awarded distinction by the French Academy. The translation now submitted to the public has been considerably delayed from the time when the Indian poetess Toru Dutt first obtained from the authoress in February, 1877, permission to undertake the task. Toru died before any progress was made.

In 1880 the same kind permission of the authoress, who died early in the year 1902, was granted to the present translator, who desired to carry out the work in memory of her friend, Toru Dutt. These delays, however, seem not altogether unfortunate, as in the meanwhile there has appeared at the Oxford University Press *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das In this work much charming correspondence between the Indian and the French authoresses is to be found.

Mlle Bader was perhaps a little before her time in her interest in Sanskrit literature, for its untold wealth had hardly at that time entered the consciousness of general readers either in France or in England. The great charm of this classical literature is that it still lives in the hearts and minds of Indians, whereas to the average man or woman in Europe the literature of Greece and Rome has little or no interest. It is the translator's hope that the knowledge of Sanskrit literature gained from this book may result in establishing a more sympathetic understanding between Europeans and Indians, and that the importance of conserving the inherent qualities of Indian womanhood may not be lost sight of in the desire to impart Western ideals and education. The attempts made so far to reach the mind and heart of Ancient India have been inevitably crude from lack of adequate materials and knowledge. Western writers have hitherto made but few attempts in this domain, but Indian writers have published some good works on this subject during the last half-century, which saw the revival of the literary movement in Bengal. It is therefore

noteworthy that this question has been dealt with by Sir A. A. Macdonell in his *History of Sanskrit Literature* and in his *Vedic Index*, and that Professor Winternitz has also written on the same subject.

It has been considered advisable to translate Mlle. Bader's book as she wrote it The translations of the quotations from the Sanskrit have been made direct from the French, except in some places where the translations were made in the first instance from English versions Scholars have expressed the opinion that Professor Wilson's translations from the Sanskrit are literal and accurate; but that the French translations (though very free and inaccurate renderings of the Sanskrit) give much more warm play of imagination and inspire and illustrate the thoughts and feelings of a girl of twenty-two much more than the dry, cold, literalness of the English versions would have done Readers would find it an interesting study to compare the English and French renderings, and the references to them have therefore been inserted in the footnotes. Their attention is also invited to the impressive sanity of judgment, joined to charming grace of sentiment, in Mlle. Bader's comparison of the *Ramāyāna* with the *Iliad*. They are the justification of that minuteness of detail into which the authoress has entered (which others, Griffiths for instance, have passed over), against any charge of prolixity that may be made: for they are needed to illustrate the soundness of her sober and at the same time picturesque criticism.

The translator is much indebted to a distinguished scholar and educationist, formerly of the Presidency College, Calcutta, who has revised the MS. and also perused the proofs, to Dr. James Morison, Librarian of the Indian Institute, Oxford, for kind help and suggestions; thanks are also due to MM. Perrin of Paris for permission to publish the translation, and to the Association des Amis de l'Orient and other friends for their willing assistance.

MARY E. R. MARTIN.

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# PART I

# CHAPTER I

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DURING the obscure period of the first ages, about fifteen centuries before the Christian era, it happened that a tribe crossed the boundaries of Aria, the mother country of the Indo-European family, and directed its way towards the South It passed the Himalayas, and after crushing by its moral and intellectual superiority the Dasyus, the aboriginal inhabitants, it formed in the Sapta Sindhu the germs of the Indian nation This tribe has left us no history of its own, but it has bequeathed to us its songs and its epic poems, which are the oldest monuments of our race and the souvenirs of our origin, and from these sources, made known to us by many admirable works of the present day, our modern literature will no doubt renew its youth.

The country of India, so fertile and so varied, so charming in its repose, so terrible in its storms, must have filled with admiration and awe the hearts of a people whose vivacity of imagination disposed them to the most opposite impressions. They adored Nature, not indeed in her perishable forms, but in those immortal principles which vivify and sustain her. As a whole Nature was represented by Aditi, the common mother of gods and men. The Vedic poets invoked her with filial love ·

"O divine Aditi, patroness worthy of confidence and cherished, come with these wise gods, these faithful protectors . . .[1] O divine and good Aditi, I call on thee to succour us . [2] Let us honour Aditi, who gives life to all."

Aditi was sometimes identified with Earth, the nurse of mankind, his support[3] in life and his last home With what fervour did the Aryans pray to her, this Earth from whose generous soil sprang the Banana, with its green canopy and its nourishing berries, the Mango and the Mangosteen, with their delicious fruits, the Tamarind, with its refreshing pulp; the Pandanus, with its clusters of white scented flowers and its leaves which the elephant loves; the Coco-nut Palm, with its fine shaped nut filled with refreshing juice; the wonderful Nepenthe, with its leafy urn which yields transparent water to the traveller; the Ebony and the Sandal, with their valuable wood; the Bamboo, with its useful wood and its delicious pulp; this Earth, that receiving the thousand branches of the Pippul, the sacred fig-tree, imparts to them the productiveness of the parent stem and produces a forest out of a single tree, this Earth, on which blossoms also the plant[4] from which the soma is extracted, the nectar of the Immortals, and on which are also spread in golden sheaves the harvest dear to the heart of the ancient husbandman This Earth was the Cybele of the Greeks, and, like the Vedas, the Homeric hymns sang of the great goddess M Villemain in his most recent masterpiece, has compared the first accents of the Greek lyrics with that sacred voice, the first to hail the reign of the gods "Whether," says the illustrious critic, "the poetry of the Homeric hymns celebrates the grand spectacle of Nature, or whether it recalls traditions of mythological cults, this poetry contains nothing subtle, like the learned hymns of Proclus, or the reminiscences of a later date collected under the name of Orpheus Rather one might recognize in the language of these songs a kind

[1] *Rig-Veda* trans by M Langlois, Section 6 lecture 1, hymne 7 Professor Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol iv p 287, verse 4 "Veda" as an abstract term often stands for the *Word* or *Revelation* See Dr K M Banerjea's *Aryan Witness*, p 10

[2] Langlois, section 6, lecture 4, hymne 11 Wilson, vol v, pp 117–19

[3] Langlois, section 8, lecture 5, hymne 6 Wilson, vol v, p 411, verse 3

[4] *Asclepias Rosea*, Roxb, *Periploca esculenta*, Linn

of pantheistic piety analogous to that which in remoter times, and amongst the forgotten ancestors of the Greek race, had inspired some of the Vedic thoughts. Such is the character of the Homeric hymn to the Earth, that material deity which was extolled by poets under the beautiful sky of India, and described in their verses as "*fertile and inexhaustible, flowing with rivers and bedecked with mountains*".[1]

What were those primitive accents? What aspirations did they express? Ingenuous and graceful like the prayers of childhood were the words in which they prayed for temporal blessings:

"O Earth, be for us a spacious and fortunate abiding-place; give us prosperity and glory.[2]

"Approach, thou, O fortunate Earth, surnamed Sītā. We honour thee that thou mayest be for us both propitious and fruitful . .

"May Sītā yield us abundant milk for many years.

"May the ploughshares successfully till the land for us; may our shepherds happily lead their flocks . . ." [3]

They invoked also the malevolent powers of the universe, these men—who had learnt to fear misfortune, who had felt fever weaken their limbs and death threaten them and who, having a presentiment of the immortality of the soul, dreaded the punishment of a future life—they symbolized evil. This was personified by Nirriti, the sombre deity. They prayed him to punish the wicked, but to spare the innocent during his earthly existence and to allow him after death to enjoy a happy eternity —

"Approach thou him who offers not libations, who sacrifices not, follow in the path of the thief and the brigand, approach thou others rather than ourselves if such be thy way, then adoration to thee, O divine Nirriti! Oh! let adoration be thine, O thou of penetrating force! Liberate him from this grievous bond and together with Yama and

[1] *Essais sur le génie de Pindare et sur la poésie lyrique dans ses rapports avec l'élévation morale et religieuse des peuples*, by M Villemain, Paris, 1859

[2] Langlois, section 1, lecture 2, hymne 3 Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol i, p 52, verse 15

[3] Langlois, section 3, lecture 4, hymne 1 Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol iii, p 224, verses 1, 2, 4

Yamî,[1] grant that this man may ascend to the highest heaven ! "[2]

The fire (Agni), the sun (Sûrya), the firmament (Indra)—each became symbolical, and each received corporeal existence.

From this Pantheon, so similar to the Grecian, arose a pleasing incarnation. When the sunlight gilded the mountains and partly lighted the plains, the Aryan, delivered from the darkness of night, hailed the Dawn with rapture,[3] recalling him to the worship of his gods and to the joyous occupations of his pastoral life ·

" Daughter of Heaven, Aurora, arise and bring us thy riches and thy opulent abundance. Brilliant and generous goddess, come with thy treasures.

" Holy prayer has often conduced to the material prosperity of man , prayer has bestowed upon him horses, goods of all sorts Aurora, may thy presence inspire my prayer and send me the happiness of riches

" She is born already, she will shine, this divine Aurora , she puts in motion the chariots, which on her arrival run up and down on the earth like vessels on the sea, greedy for riches . . .

" Aurora, like the good mother of a family, comes to protect the world Her arrival stops the flight of the evil genius of night and rouses the birds to take to their wings

" Aurora arouses alike the diligent and the poor man ; she is the enemy of idleness

" The whole world prostrates itself at her appearance

" Daughter of Heaven, shine with thy gentle radiance ! [4]

" As she revives speech and prayer, Aurora spreads her brilliant tints , she opens for us the gates of day She

[1] Yama or Mrityu, god of death Yamî, wife of Yama

[2] *Studj orientale e linguistici* Raccolta periodica di Ascoli Fascicolo secondo, Milano, 1855 " Tendi a colui che non fa libazione, che non sagrifica , siegui la via del ladro, del masnadiero , ad altri che a noi tendi, sia tale il tuo cammino e adorazione a te, o diva Nirriti ! Oh ben sia adorazione a te dall' acute vigore Solvi questo ferreo vincolo, e tu, d'accordo con Jama e Jami, fa che s'innalzi codest' uomo al cielo supremo " (*Jajurv Vâgasaneji-Sanh* , xii, 62–4 )

[3] Preceded by the Ashwins (the celestial horsemen, the two Twilights), the Dawn, mounted on a chariot drawn by red horses, causes to fly before her, her sister, Night

[4] Langlois section i, lecture iv, hymne ii Wilson s *Rig-Veda*, vol i, 128, verses 1 to 9

illuminates the world, and discloses the beauties of nature to us . . .

"Daughter of Heaven, thou dost appear, young, covered with a shining veil, queen of all earthly treasures; Aurora, shine propitiously to-day for us.

"Following in the path of Auroras of the past, thou art the first of future Auroras, of the eternal Auroras. Come thou, reanimate that which is alive, Aurora! come, re-vivify that which is dead."[1]

Thus did the poet express his happiness at the resurrection of Nature. Suddenly an unaccountable sadness seized him; he thought on the rapid passage of man through this world, on which the same rays shine every day.

"How long is it since Aurora has been coming to visit us? . . . They are dead, the human beings who beheld the splendour of the ancient Aurora: we shall meet their fate, we who are beholding her to-day; they also will die, those who will behold the Auroras of the future."

We have already seen that the same mother (Aditi) unites man with the gods. This union is strengthened again by feminine personifications: for prayers of mortals become spouses of the gods, and these in their turn receive the sacrifice of the soma, that three goddesses preside over: the ambrosia by which man sustains their immortality—a mutual responsibility as curious as it was striking. Prayer assures the happiness of the creature, whilst sacrifice sustains the existence of the Asura,[2] the principle of life.

"I reign, I command," exclaimed Indrāṇī, wife of Indra, in a hymn of striking lyrical beauty attributed to the goddess herself. "My voice inspires terror. I am the victorious one; may my husband recognize my strength. O Devas! it is I who made the sacrifice from which the great and glorious Indra derived all his strength."[3]

Such was prayer as the Aryans understood it; but towards the end of the hymn the symbolic character seems to disappear and the feminine element alone to remain: "Yes," she

[1] Langlois, section 1, lecture 8, hymne 1. Wilson, vol i, p 298, verses 1, 4, 7, 8

[2] Later on this word designated the Titans of India

[3] Section 8, lecture 8, hymne 17 Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, edition 1888, vol vi, pp 388, 389

repeats, "I am without rival, I have no longer an enemy. I triumph, in destroying the passing glory and the fleeting riches of those women who were desiring to eclipse me.

"May these rivals yield to my superiority; may I shine alone in the eyes of the hero, my husband, and of this people"

In these proud expressions and the jealous scorn of Indrānī, the consort of the god wielding the thunderbolt, do we not foresee the Juno of the Greeks?

We have already mentioned that three goddesses presided over sacrifices: Ilā, the rite; Bhārati, the poetical union of gesture and voice, the mother of the Bhāratas, in whom a learned Indologist has recognized the originals of our Western bards [1]; lastly, the most august of all, Sarasvatī, "the holy word, the word that conquers, the purifying virgin," as the Veda styles her who is also the inspirer of beauty.

Sarasvatī was besides goddess of the waters. On this subject, M. Nève [2] has pointed out the assimilation established by the primitive Aryan religions between speech and the liquid element. The three ancient Muses of Pieria, Memory, Meditation, and Song, were originally Naiads, whose domain was transported from the world of matter to the world of intelligence

Pure and limpid like the streamlet following in its peaceful course the green slopes of the hills, impetuous like the torrent dashing in foam down the mountain side, rapid like the rivers and streams hastening to reach their mouths, majestic and restless like the Ocean whose motion and sound are at the same time all variety and all harmony—to all these was speech compared by the genius alike of Greece, Rome and India

Thus not only were the physical forces of Nature deified, but also pre-eminently the moral powers Prayer and speech, the sublime ideas of beauty and goodness, soared in the calm regions of the understanding, and what is worthy of remark, all the pantheistical creeds symbolized such immaterial phenomena by feminine personifications

Religion had for sacrificing priests the heads of families, for temples the summits of mountains, where the altar was raised without any shelter from the sky. Man, freely lifting

[1] M Émile Burnouf, *Essai sur le Veda, ou Introduction à la connaissance de l'Inde*, 1863

[2] *Essai sur le mythe des Ribhavas*, 1847

his eyes towards space, could from this height contemplate the Deity in his manifestations

Before the sacrifice began, wandering over the hills were seen the women charged to collect the Kusa,[1] the grass to carpet the sacred enclosure, and the plant [2] from which the soma was extracted

At the commencement of the ceremony, whilst Agni, the fire symbolized, developed its flame upon the altar and was fed by the priests pouring upon it the nectar of the gods, whilst the hymn evoked the protecting forces and conjured the evil powers of the universe, the wife of the officiating priest advanced, surrounded by her female attendants, and decorated the sanctuary with flowers Then the rays of Agni, casting their brilliancy upon her, and covering her with an aureole, she thence received the title of devi (*div*, to shine), from the word *deva*, which designated the gods and the officiating priests The sacred books celebrated the happiness of the married couples, who mingled at the feet of the Divinity their fervent prayers of faith and adoration ·

" O gods," says the Rig-Veda, " the married couple, who together intend to present to you libations and offerings without ceasing, who together come on the grass to place there the sacred food and to prepare an abundant repast for you, who implore your goodwill, who honour you with praises, and shower presents upon you, this couple, surrounded by little children and growing sons and daughters, pass a happy life and are clothed in raiment shining with gold." [3]

Women had not only the right of offering sacrifices in their own names, but also that of composing hymns The Rig-Veda numbers some of them amongst its authors Perhaps the names of goddesses by which they are mostly indicated [4]

[1] *Poa cynosuroides*

[2] *Asclepiade acide*

[3] Langlois, section vi, lecture 2, hymne xi Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol v, p 35 Edition 1888, pub Trübner & Co

[4] Women were the subjects of miracles, which the ancient hymns often celebrated By favour of the Asvins (the two Twilights and also the heavenly Physicians, the *Dioscuri* of India) Ghoshā was cured of leprosy and reunited to her husband, who had repulsed her Two hymns are attributed to her addressed to her protectors, but M Langlois supposes that here she personifies Prayer The Asvins also manifested their supernatural power in restoring a princess, Vispalā, from the consequences of a cruel wound In a conflict in which she had bravely fought, she lost a foot,

were simply an attribution, but one fact is, however, certain, namely, that the Aryans admitted the intervention of a sex in the teaching of dogma as well as in the exercises of religion, to which, later on, the law forbade the reading of those same hymns and the observance of the simplest religious duties.

Between the Vedic and Brāhmanical periods came the transitory epoch, which witnessed the dawn of the separation of the spiritual from the temporal power and whose literary monuments are the Brāhmanas and Shāstras. This epoch still retained a certain liberty of expression for woman's religious aspirations

In a dialogue in which the Aryan genius was displayed in all the grandeur of its spiritual tendencies and in which the great question of the immortality of the soul was debated and a solution of that formidable problem which is put to everyone in this world was attempted, one of the interlocutors is a woman, and it is she who began the solemn conversation. In his *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*,[1] Professor Max Muller has translated this eloquent page, which runs as follows:—

"Maitrēyī," said Yājnavalkya, "I am going away from this my house (into the forest) Forsooth I must make a settlement between thee and my other wife, Kātyāyanī."

Maitrēyī said, "My lord, if this whole earth full of wealth belonged to me, should I be immortal by it?"

"No," replied Yājnavalkya, "like the happy life of rich people will be thy life, but there is no hope of immortality by wealth."

And Maitrēyī said· "What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal? What my lord knows of (immortality) may he tell that to me"

Yājnavalkya replied "Thou who art truly dear to me, thou speakest dear words Sit down, I will explain it to thee, and listen well to what I say" And he said "A husband is loved, not because you love the husband, but because you love (in him) the Divine Spirit (Atman, the absolute Self)

which the Asvins replaced by an iron one, with the aid of which she was able to repair again to the field of battle Another woman, named Ritasthubh, obtained from the same gods honour and glory

[1] *A history of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, so far as it illustrates the primitive religion of the Brāhmans*, by Max Muller, 1860

A wife is loved, not because we love the wife, but because we love (in her) the Divine Spirit. Children are loved, not because we love the children, but because we love the Divine Spirit in them. This Spirit it is which we love when we (seem to) love wealth, brahmans, kshatriyas, this world, the gods, all beings, this universe. The Divine Spirit, O beloved wife, is to be seen, to be heard, to be perceived, and to be meditated upon. If we see, hear, perceive, and know him, O Maitrēyī, then this whole universe is known to us."

"Whosoever looks for Brahmahood elsewhere than in the Divine Spirit, should be abandoned by the brahmans Whosoever looks for the kshatra-power elsewhere than in the Divine Spirit, should be abandoned by the kshatras. Whosoever looks for this world, for the gods, for all beings, for this universe, elsewhere than in the Divine Spirit, should be abandoned by them all This brahmahood, this kshatra-power, this world, these gods, these beings, this universe, all is the Divine Spirit"

"Now, as we cannot seize the sounds of a drum externally by themselves, but seize the sound by seizing the drum, or the beating of it, as we cannot seize the sounds of a conch-shell by themselves, but seize the sound by seizing the conch-shell, or the shell-blower—as we cannot seize the sounds of a lute by themselves, but seize the sound by seizing the lute, or the lutanist—so is it with the Divine Spirit."

"As clouds of smoke rise out of a fire kindled with dry fuel, thus, O Maitrēyī, have all the holy words been breathed out of that Great Being"

"As all the waters find their centre in the sea, so all sensations find their centre in the skin, all tastes in the tongue, all smells in the nose, all colours in the eye, all sounds in the ear, all thoughts in the mind, all knowledge in the heart, all actions in the hands, and all the Holy Scriptures in speech."

"It is with us when we enter into the Divine Spirit, as if a lump of salt was thrown into the sea, it becomes dissolved into the water (from which it was produced) and is not to be taken out again, but wherever you take the water, and taste it, it is salt Thus this great, endless, and boundless Being is but one mass of knowledge As the water becomes salt, and the salt becomes water again, thus has the Divine Spirit appeared from out the elements and disappears again

into them. When we have passed away, there is no longer any name. This, I tell thee, my wife," said Yājnavalkya.

Maitrēyī said, "My lord, here thou hast bewildered me, saying that there is no longer any name when we have passed away."

And Yājnavalkya replied: "My wife, what I say is not bewildering, it is sufficient for the highest knowledge. For if there be, as it were, two beings, then the one sees the other, the one hears, perceives, and knows the other. But if the one divine Self be the whole of all this, whom or through whom should he see, hear, perceive, or know? How should he know (himself), by whom he knows everything (himself)? How, my wife, should he know (himself) the knower? Thus thou hast been taught, Maitrēyī; this is immortality." Having said this, Yājnavalkya left his wife for ever, and went into the solitude of the forests.

This was the most complete expression of belief in the Universal Spirit, in the absorption of all individuality in the Great All, a belief that could conduce to the purest monotheism as well as the coarsest pantheism, to the hopes of a future life, as to the terrors of annihilation.

Such was the teaching that woman was judged capable of receiving, and what was still more, of understanding. Nevertheless, Maitrēyī was considered a rare type. "Cases like Maitrēyī were exceptions, not the rule," says Professor Max Müller.[1] Already the Indians feared to initiate Woman into their philosophical or religious doctrines. Whether she understood these doctrines or no, the danger appeared to them the same. If she comprehended the vanity of earthly things, was it not to be feared that her character might acquire that proud independence which scorns to bend to a human yoke? If her mind falsified the teaching committed to it, was it not to be feared that she might communicate it in its altered form to those who were considered unworthy of sharing the benefits of religion?

The time was approaching when, under Divine sanction, women would be placed by law in the same rank as these last.

Manu[2] had appeared. Indian society was formed and

[1] *A history of Ancient Sanskrit Literature.*

[2] The Indians identified their ancient legislator with Manu Svayambhuva, the first man and the first king.

regulated. The priest (Brāhman), the soldier (Kshattriya), defender of the state and especially of the Brāhman; the agriculturist (Vaisya), shared amongst themselves the powers which the Aryan united in his own person. At the lowest step of the social scale, nearer to the brute creation than to humanity, was placed the Sudra, to whom, by religious analogy, woman was assimilated.

The power of the Brāhman, dreaded by the gods themselves, was the basis of this everlasting constitution.

Religion had little altered. On the one hand, however, the idea of a primary cause had been developed. Already the Aryan had imperfectly seen, in the fire kindled by man, in the sun which illuminated and warmed the earth, in the lightning that furrowed the cloud, manifestations of the same principle. Agni, Sūrya, Indra, were confounded, and the universal motive power became Brahma the Supreme Being.

On the other hand, the Indian Pantheon remained the same, and the forces of Nature which the Aryans adored became inferior divinities hierarchically classified. But between the drawing up of Manu's laws and the time of the great epic poems, the theogony sustained great modifications. Man had fought; the producing power did not appear to him to be complete without the assistance of the destroying power, and Shiva, the ancient Rudra of the Vedas, the destroying principle, was joined to Brahma, the creating principle. Man, however, by a secret instinct, felt the need of equalizing these two forces and Vishnu, the principal preserver, was placed between them, until the time, when his gentle and majestic form, becoming incarnate in Krishna, took such proportions that he attracted irresistibly to himself the most sympathetic adoration of India. Brahma would be forgotten in his repose, his work accomplished, Vishnu and Shiva would reign.

The spouses of the gods now personified their producing energy. To Brahma was united Sarasvatī, the ancient goddess of the Aryans, the pacific Minerva, protectress of the fine arts. With Shiva was associated Pārvatī, *the daughter of the mountain*, recalling proud Juno. This goddess manifested herself under different aspects: now she is Dūrgā, the warlike Minerva, succouring the just who implored her, punishing the wicked

who disregarded her: another time she is Kālī, the sombre Hecate[1]; in this last manifestation, she was truly the partner of the destroying genius and presented herself in frightful colours to the Oriental imagination, appearing in scenes of carnage and horror claiming the blood of the dying to quench the thirst of the vampires who followed in her train another time she is Bhavānī, the goddess of fecundity, apparently a contradiction; yet is not death one of the sources of life?

Lastly to Vishnu was allied Lakshmī or Srī, the goddess of abundance and of happiness, the Grecian Ceres; under the most smiling attributes, accompanied by Kāma, Love, the bodiless god whose arrows are feathered with flowers, did she appear before the poet who sang of her and before the people who cherished her. Like the Grecian Venus and the Scandinavian Freya,[2] Lakshmī was born from the bosom of the waters[3] The Vishnu Purāna, of which we do not possess a French version, but which has been elegantly translated into English by the learned Professor Wilson, describes in noble and poetic terms the apparition of the goddess While the Immortals were churning the Ocean in order to recover the ambrosia, and while, agitated by the gods and Daityas (the Titans of India), the waves rose and roared, the Apsaras, those fairylike and charming *bayadères* who skim along the heaven of Indra in their dances, shot up from the waves, preceded by the Pārijāta, the coral-tree, with its clusters of bright red flowers, which perfumed the air and dazzled the eyes. The moon rising, shed her silver rays upon the waves. Suddenly Dhanvantari, the Esculapius of the Hindu Pantheon, draped in white garments, floated along the surface, bearing triumphantly the cup containing the divine beverage "Then," the English version continues, "seated on a full-blown lotus, and holding a water-lily in her hand, the goddess

[1] The Indians have not only their Hecate but also their Fates, they are two young girls, Dhata and Vidhata, who are continually spinning a web composed of black and white threads (the days and nights)

[2] Comp M Ampère, *Littérature et Voyages.* The illustrious Academician makes a direct connexion between the Scandinavian beliefs and the Oriental ones M Eichhoff, as we shall see further on, has devoted a few remarkable and interesting pages in comparing the legends of the North and the East

[3] This was her second birth, for in a previous existence she was the daughter of Bhrigu, the sage who promulgated the laws of Manu

[4] The *Vishnu Purāna*, translated by Wilson, book i, chapter ix

Srī, radiant with beauty, rose from the waves The great sages enraptured, hymned her with the song dedicated to her praise. Viswavasu and other heavenly quiristers sang, and Ghritāchī and other celestial nymphs danced before her. Gangā and other holy streams attended for her ablutions, and the elephants of the skies, taking up their pure waters in vases of gold, poured them over the goddess, the queen of the universal world. The sea of milk in person presented her with a wreath of never-fading flowers, and the artist of the gods (Viswakarmā) decorated her person with heavenly ornaments. Thus bathed, attired, and adorned, the goddess, in the view of the celestials, cast herself upon the bosom of Hari,[1] and there reclining, turned her eyes upon the deities, who were inspired with rapture by her gaze."

This charming deity, whose throne is the calyx of a lotus, does she not call to mind the Titania of the Northern legends, the Queen of the Elfs, who in the dim light of the disc of night, shows herself to the dreamy poet, seated on a rose-leaf, her aerial chariot drawn by eight butterflies?

But the Daityas, irritated at seeing the goddess of fortune in the midst of the gods their rivals, who already possessed the cup of immortality, burst forth in anger; they stole the ambrosia, which, however, Vishnu recovered, and the gods, imbued with fresh strength by the celestial beverage, confounded their enemies and precipitated them into the subterranean regions of the dark Pātāla Then Nature revived and bloomed with her most radiant smile, the stars continued their interrupted course, the sun shed its warmest rays, the flame of sacrifice shot up brilliant and swift, every creature worshipped the victorious gods Indra was yet king of the ethereal regions It was to Lakshmī that the god with the arm of thunder brought the homage of the universe We will again quote from the English version and give the eloquent prayer addressed by Indra to the laughing deity.

"I bow down to Srī, the mother of all beings, seated on her lotus throne, with eyes like full-blown lotuses, reclining on the breast of Vishnu. Thou art Siddhi (superhuman power): thou art Swadhā and Swahā thou art ambrosia (Sudhā), the purifier of the universe: thou art evening, night, and dawn: thou art power, faith, intellect: thou art the

[1] One of the names of Vishnu

goddess of letters (Saraswatī) Thou, beautiful goddess, art knowledge of devotion, great knowledge, mystic knowledge, and spiritual knowledge, which confers eternal liberation. Thou art the science of reasoning, the three Vedas, the arts, and sciences: thou art moral and political science The world is peopled by thee with pleasing or displeasing forms. Who else than thou, oh goddess, is seated on that person of the god of gods, the wielder of the mace, which is made up of heaps of sacrifices and contemplated by holy ascetics? Abandoned by thee, the three worlds[1] were on the brink of ruin, but they have been reanimated by thee From thy propitious gaze, oh mighty goddess, men obtain wives, children, dwellings, friends, harvests, wealth Health and strength, power, victory, happiness, are easy of attainment to those upon whom thou smilest Thou art the mother of all things, as the god of gods, Hari, is their father; and this world, whether animate or inanimate, is pervaded by thee and Vishnu. Oh thou who purifiest all things, forsake not our treasures, our granaries, our dwellings, our dependents, our persons, our wives abandon not our children, our friends, our lineage, our jewels, oh thou who abidest on the bosom of the god of gods They whom thou desertest are forsaken by truth, by purity, by goodness, by every amiable and excellent quality, whilst the base and worthless, upon whom thou lookest favourably, become immediately endowed with all excellent qualifications, with families, with power He on whom thy countenance is turned, is honourable, amiable, prosperous, wise, and of exalted birth; a hero of irresistible prowess, but all his merits and his advantages are turned into worthlessness from whom, beloved of Vishnu, mother of the world, thou avertest thy face The tongues of Brahma are unequal to celebrate thy excellence Be propitious to me, oh goddess, lotus-eyed, and never forsake me more" Where is the powerful Indra of the Vedas? Here he is only an inferior deity absorbed into the glory of Vishnu The gracious dignity of the beautiful sovereign, the courteous deference of Indra, make this scene very characteristic.

"Being thus praised, the gratified Srī, abiding in all creatures and heard by all beings, replied to the god of a hundred rites (Satakratu) · "I am pleased, monarch of the gods, by thine

[1] The earth, the atmosphere, the celestial world, or world of Brahma

adoration. Demand from me what thou desirest; I have come to fulfil thy wishes." "If goddess," replied Indra, "thou wilt grant my prayers; if I am worthy of thy bounty, be this my first request, that the three worlds may never again be deprived of thy presence. My second supplication, daughter of Ocean, is, that thou wilt not forsake him who shall celebrate thy praises in the words I have addressed to thee" "I will not abandon," the goddess answered, "the three worlds again this, thy first boon, is granted, for I am gratified by thy praises, and further, I will never turn my face away from that mortal who morning and evening shall repeat the hymn with which thou hast addressed me"

Whether or no the feminine element was largely found in the Brāhmanical pantheon, we have already seen that woman was far from retaining her important religious attributes in the newly formed society.

Manu minutely detailed the duties of man towards the gods, but as for woman, what a fall!

"The ceremony of marriage is recognized by legislators as taking the place, for women, of the sacrament of initiation [1] prescribed by the Veda, their zeal in the service of their husbands stands with them instead of dwelling with a spiritual father [2]; and the care of home instead of the maintenance of the sacred fire.[3]

"There is no sacrifice, pious practice, or fast which concerns women in particular, she must cherish and respect her husband and then will she be honoured in heaven" [4]

Manu then did not recognize woman's right to lift up her soul to God, to strengthen herself by prayer for her duties, to purify herself by penance [5] Instead of sanctifying her

[1] The investiture of the sacred string, the privilege of the first three castes

[2] The Brâhman spent the time that elapsed between his initiation and his marriage under the direction of a guru or spiritual master

[3] *Mânava-Dharma-Sâstra*, *Laws of Manu*, translated by Loiseleur Deslongchamps. Paris, 1883, book ii, sloka 67

[4] Id book v, sloka 155

[5] Manu, however, allows woman to assist at the grand oblations, which the Brâhman ought to offer daily the adoration of the Veda, the offerings to the Manes, the offerings to God and to the spirits, and the duties of hospitality But the first of these religious duties, which consisted in reciting, reading, and teaching the holy scriptures, was it still in Manu's time prescribed for women? No sacrament was for her accompanied with prayer. Manu

by the worship of immutable perfection, he debased her by the exclusive adoration of a creature similar to herself and subject likewise to the weakness of humanity.

The Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata mention facts which agree but little with the spirit of this iniquitous law. The analysis of these epic poems will reveal women celebrating the sacred rites within the domestic sanctuary, retiring even with her husband to the forests, uniting the piety of the ascetic with the devotion of the wife and mother and attaining at last by her holy conduct to Swarga, the Paradise of Indra.

A new religion ought to be more liberal; we shall study it elsewhere in those countries where it is still dominant, we shall only recall here one such influence on the country from which it took its birth but without taking root

Buddhism,[1] which expresses the revolt of the three lower castes against the long oppression of the Brāhmans, could not forget in its task of liberation, a sex from which Brāhmanism had withdrawn all individuality, if not in its customs at least in its laws, even in the presence of the Deity

Women, therefore, received Buddha with enthusiasm, for he was also their liberator In the aunt who had reared him, and in the pure and worthy wife whom he chose, he found ardent disciples of his doctrine During the time of his voluntary exile young girls brought him food During his preaching, so stormy at times, when the gates of Bhadramkara were closed against him and when its inhabitants had promised the Brāhmans not to yield to the call of him who desired to wrest them from their tyranny, it was a Brāhmanī, who, braving all dangers and obstacles, was the first to disobey the open prohibition and to throw herself at the feet of Buddha and to prevail on her countrywomen to follow her example. When he explained the system of ideas contained in the lotus of the good law, the six thousand women whom he had permitted to embrace the same ascetic life as himself were present Unhappily, it was by taking them away from their families that they were granted religious emancipation

commanded her to make oblations, but forbade her to utter the holy formulas He threatened with hell the young woman who should sacrifice to Fire We shall see, however, that Sāvitrī endeavoured to move the gods by that sacrifice.

[1] See on Buddhism, the important works of Messrs Eugene Burnouf, Foucaux, Barthelémy Saint-Hilaire

and made the apostles of his doctrine, the Buddhas of the future.

This doctrine, which recognized nothing as real except suffering, which ignored God, which believed not in the soul—such a desolating doctrine had as its adepts those who suffered in this world and who, believing in the transmigration of the soul, saw supreme happiness in the complete destruction of the thinking and acting self Virtue and charity were the means for attaining that object, but what is that virtue which does not believe in itself and that charity which to save man isolates him from the world and causes him continually to mortify himself without benefit to others? Inaction was after all the best, the most acceptable way of leading to annihilation, to Nirvāna. Strange aberration! Life is a battle not by fleeing from it can we obtain the prize. Is not mankind purified and strengthened by the struggles of this world, those generous struggles that lead to the triumph of justice and of truth? Then only can man deserve, not indeed the repose of annihilation, but that of immortality

A reaction followed. The moral restraint which the people had imposed upon themselves, made them regret the ancient yoke of Brāhmanism, which again revived.

For the severe precepts of Buddhism was substituted a cult, which instead of quelling the passions rather favoured their development The Hindus thus passed from one extreme to the other, without ever finding again the golden mean of their ancestors. Buddhism had set up a severely ascetic moral standard for women; Krishnaism now laid down another, which made her decline morally

We will not dwell longer on this cult; but we will borrow from one of those literary monuments a legend which describes how exceptionally a woman fulfilled a rôle of austere beauty.

This episode is contained in the Bhāgavata-Purāna,[1] one of the sacred books of the reviving Brāhmanism, which were drawn up especially for women and for those who were debarred from reading the Vedas.

The time of the fifth incarnation of Vishnu was not far

[1] The *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, or *Histoire poétique de Krishna*, translated by M Eugène Burnouf, Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1840 (see t I).

off.[1] The god rewarded the faith and the love of the recluse Kardama, son of Brahma, by promising to be born of the ascetic's wife. Dēvahūti, daughter of Manu, the first man, chosen for the honour of becoming the mother of a god, had attracted to herself, by the elevation of her character and the austerity of her conduct, the veneration of the recluse, who shared with her the gift of the divine vision: "Thou art perfect," said he to her, "enjoy those perfections, which thou owest to thine own virtue." Suddenly Dēvahūti became transfigured. Her beauty shone with superhuman brightness. Magnificently attired, crowned with flowers, followed by graceful young girls, she mounted with Kardama the magic chariot which appeared at a signal from the recluse. This chariot, glittering with precious stones covered with silken hangings, that depicted white doves and swans of dazzling plumage, transported the holy couple into all the regions of the globe, and after their return to the hermitage, it still served them as an abode.

Nine times did Dēvahūti become the mother of daughters; but in the midst of the charms of her fairy existence, in the midst even of the joys of maternity, she was unhappy; she was aware that Kardama was but lending himself momentarily to terrestrial joys, that he would soon leave her and abandon himself to an ascetic life. Her husband gone, her daughters married, what would remain for her, who was already experiencing the painful void that material pleasure leaves behind it?

"He," she said to Kardama, "he, whose actions in this world have for their aim neither duty nor detachment, nor the cult of the god, whose feet are like a sacred pool, such a one, although living is already dead."[2]

Touched by her suffering, the recluse revealed to her the promises of Vishnu. Consoled, Dēvahūti prepared herself for the great destiny that awaited her, by the ardent observance of pious exercises, for a long time neglected.

The divine mystery was at last fulfilled. Vishnu descended upon the earth.

[1] The incarnation of Vishnu in Kapila was previous to Buddha Siddhārtha, but the Bhāgavata-Purāna, from which we have quoted this extract, having been drawn up, according to the illustrious editor, M Eugène Burnouf, previous to the fourteenth century of our era, it is as explanatory of the customs of the latter epoch that we have here inserted an event, which in chronological order ought to have been quoted before.

[2] Livre iii, chap xxiii.

"Then," continued the sacred poet, "one heard in the sky, the sound of musical instruments issuing from the midst of dark clouds; the Gandharvas [1] were singing of the god, the Apsaras were dancing for joy. Divine flowers floated down, dropped from the inhabitants of the air; everything began to look cheerful, the points in the horizon, the waters, and the hearts of men." [2]

Even Brahma displayed himself in his majesty before the eyes of Kardama and Dēvahūti, to the latter he promised regeneration

"The god of the golden hair, of the lotus eyes, having on the soles of his feet the impression of the water lily, who comes to lay bare the hidden roots of Nature's works by means of science, human and divine, the god, vanquisher of Kaitabha,[3] who is, O woman, descended into thy bosom, shall traverse the earth, after having cut in thee the knot of ignorance and doubt."

"Chief of the troop of Siddhas,[4] surrounded by the respect of masters in the Sānkya doctrine,[5] he shall receive in this world the name of Kapila, and shall cause thy glory to increase." [6]

The sacred author, passing over in silence the infancy of Kapila, comes directly to the moment when Kardama was preparing to depart. His daughters were married, but he left his wife a divine comforter "I will declare to my mother," said the happy Vishnu to him, "I will declare to my mother the science of the supreme Spirit, this science which destroys all works and by which she will shake off all fear" [7] And on the faith of this promise the recluse directed his way towards the forests

Dēvahūti in her thirst for truth implored of her son the grace of being delivered from the errors of the senses and of living henceforth by the spirit; and Kapila declared to her his celebrated doctrine. During long conversations, the

[1] Celestial musicians

[2] Ibid, iii, chap xxiv

[3] Daitya or Titan killed by Vishnu

[4] "Siddha, divine personage who inhabits the skies and enjoys supernatural powers, which he has acquired through austerities" M E Lancereau, *Hitōpadeśa*

[5] Doctrine of Kapila

[6] Livre iii, chap xxiv

[7] Ibid

attentive and thoughtful mother received from her son the highest teaching in philosophy and in religion. She imbibed from this pure source new strength for good and renewed ardour for virtue. When Bhagavat[1] on finishing his work of regeneration, said to her " I have declared to thee, worthy woman, that science which is the design of Brahma, a science by means of which one recognizes the true essence of Nature and of the Spirit," she inclined herself before her divine master and worshipped the son, who, by illuminating her soul with the light of truth, had caused the shades of darkness to disappear for ever. She quitted her magic chariot, returned to the earth to pray and to suffer and to absorb herself in a life of contemplation, without action, such as the Indian ideas required and thus attained her final deliverance. Her soul, released from the body she had conquered, darted radiantly towards the heavens, and her body, purified through penance, became in its dissolution, a holy river.

A woman, saved from ignorance by her son, a god, and judged worthy of obtaining the utmost limits of intelligence, what an apotheosis of her sex, in the revived Brāhmanism !

[1] This name signifies blessed and is applied to Vishnu

# CHAPTER II

## THE YOUNG GIRL AND MARRIAGE

The Aryans; their need for a male posterity Comparisons which young girl inspired in the authors of the Veda. Her pastoral occupations. Were those her only duties? Marriage Choice of a husband; hymn of Syāvāswa to the Maruts Dowry. hymn of Kakshivān. The marriage celebration: the wedding of Sūrya The Brāhmanical society. its desire likewise for a male issue, but different motive. The name of a woman. Manu's silence respecting a young girl's education, the epic poems and dramatic works are more explicit. Charming types of young girls in the Sanskrit works Filial devotion · Lopamudrā. Marriages Mixed castes Choice of a husband still retained by the Kshattriya's daughter Swayamvara of Draupadī Swayamvara of Gopā, wife of Buddha Siddhārtha Rite of the evil spirits Rite of the saints Divine rite Rite of Brahma Kardama and Dēvahūti. Rite of the Creators Rāma and Sitā Rite of the Gandharvas · legend of Sacuntalā Rite of the Rākshasas rape of Rukminī

DURING the advance of the white Aryan family into the Sapta Sindhu, it was not without a struggle that the indigenous yellow race, uncultivated in their customs, rude in their tastes, having no idea of a Deity, yielded to the ascendancy of strangers who were proud of the purity of their race, their delicacy of feeling, their religious instinct, and who founded their authority upon their noble origin and the will of their gods.

The Dasyus, so despised by the Aryans, were, however, superior to them in number. The conquerors therefore often repeated in their hymns this earnest prayer:

"May we possess a family of males."

The birth of a daughter consequently deceived their expectations. The child was, nevertheless, lovingly treated; she was shielded by her mother's solicitude, by the protection of her father, and also of her brother, who is named in the Vedic language, *bhrâtri*, support, the root of which is found in most Indo-European languages The Vedic poets often evoked by touching or gracious comparisons the memory of those young people by whom their race was perpetuated. At one time, in a hymn to Indra, in which allusion was made to the tender and considerate attentions which characterized

family relationships and gave them so much strength and sweetness, they called to mind the need of protection, which in their weakness young girls required, and of the succour due to them: "As a virtuous maiden, who lives with her father and mother, and expects from them the support to which her devotion to them gives her the claim, as such I come to ask thee for a share in thy favours." [1] At another time singing the charms of the Dawn, they also described those of the virgin: "Like a young girl unfolding her veil, so do we see Aurora adorned with the golden splendour of the sun . . ." [2]

"Like a virgin, graceful and slender, O goddess, thou dost hasten to the god of sacrifice" [3]

According to the remark of our learned Orientalists, the young girl was designated by the name of *duhitri*, of which the root is still retained in the German idiom, indicating her principal duty in the Vedic family; namely, milking the cow, the sacred animal of India Was that her most important occupation? Were material cares her only lot? This may be doubted on reading the hymns of the Veda, attributed to women, and which supposed a highly moral and religious education

Besides, in primitive India, where marriage was the most important duty of man in a growing society, and where the Aryan united in his person the power of the officiating priest to that of head of the family, the woman, who was chosen to share this double authority, must needs be prepared for the greatness of her mission.

The Veda has left us the most precise details of the incidents which preceded and accompanied the tying of the nuptial knot and of the religious ceremonies which consecrated it The young maiden was free to choose the husband to whom she should unite her lot; this peculiarity is denoted in the hymn of Syāvāswa to the Maruts.[4]

[1] M Langlois, section ii, lecture vi, hymne ix Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol ii, p 251, verse 7

[2] M Langlois, section ii, lecture i, hymne ii. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol ii, p 1, verse 2

[3] M Langlois, section ii, lecture i, hymne ii. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol ii, p 9, verse 10.

[4] M Langlois, section iv, lecture iii, hymne xv. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol iii, p 345, verses 5, 6, 7

Syāvāswa was the son of a priest attached to the person of a king, a fact, indicating in the Vedic period a time when caste distinction tended to establish itself by separating the spiritual from the temporal power. During a sacrifice Syāvāswa had observed the daughter of his sovereign. Struck by her beauty, he sought a union with her, but being, doubtless, too poor, was rejected. He was yet suffering from the refusal, when a princess Sasīyasī sent for him. Amongst those who in virtue of their rank could eligibly aspire to her hand, she had selected the son of king Purumilha, and in the hope of concluding this desired match she sent Syāvāswa to the court of that monarch.

Syāvāswa was a poet and in love ; he succeeded in his mission. The newly married couple were lavish in their benefactions towards the ambassador, whose negotiations had resulted in their marriage. In his excessive gratitude Syāvāswa extolled in magnificent language the princess' liberality and the support that her husband would find in her firmness of character.

" Sasīyasī," he says, " has given me droves of cows and horses, together with a hundred chariots. For the husband recommended by Syāvāswa, she has become a strong and powerful support

" Differing from other women, Sasīyasī has proved herself more generous than a man who no longer honours the gods and who is greedy for gain.

" Amongst the Devas, she seeks him who may be fatigued, oppressed by thirst or want, and it is upon him she directs her thoughts."

The happiness of the young couple caused him to reflect sadly upon himself, and his song of thanksgiving ended with a beseeching invocation : ' O Night," adds he, " carry my hymn to the son of Darbha. O goddess, become the chariot of my prayer

" Speak of me to Rathavīti at the moment of pouring out the libation. Tell him that my love for his daughter is not extinguished."

Here, not only the young girl was not sold to her betrothed, but she was even dowered by her father or her brother. The former was a rare event in antiquity, and it eloquently proved that the Aryan understood the moral value of his wife and the

dignity of marriage. At that time woman was not considered as goods for sale, but as the possessor of a soul which could give itself away.

One of the authors of the Veda, Kakshīvān, gives thanks to the gods for the riches accruing to him through his marriage with the grand-daughter of king Bhāvya.[1] Kakshīvān was returning to his family after the completion of his studies when, fatigued by travel, he rested by the roadside and fell asleep. On waking, he was no longer alone. The son of Bhāvya, Swayana, was beside him, and he invited him into his chariot. He soon offered him his daughter Romasā, besides gold, numerous flocks, chariots, and horses, and brought him home to his father, followed by a numerous escort. Kakshīvān related to his family the joys and triumphs of his journey, and the young princess, advancing in her turn towards her father-in-law, timidly addressed him :

" He has accepted me as his wife and I cling to him like the rider to the whip which he grips in his hand. My husband grants me the enjoyment of a thousand precious gifts.

" Suffer me to approach you. Have pity on my weakness. I shall be always Romasā, that is to say, the ewe of the Gāndhāras "[2]

The myth of the wedding of Sūrya, which has been recently commented on by M Émile Burnouf, in his remarkable Essay on the Veda, gives a vivid picture of marriage ceremonies amongst the Aryans While in the sacred enclosure the priests were invoking Agni, and the soma was bursting from plants pressed under the mortar, the chief sacrificial priest as he waited near the altar for the arrival of the betrothed, intoned the marriage hymn The maiden, followed by her bridesmen as a guard of honour belonging both to the family she was leaving and to the one into which she was now entering, advanced with solemn pomp. The priest gave her for a chariot, Prayer, and for a canopy, the sacrificial Fire, touching images of the holy consecration received on her marriage. Her friends now pressed forward within the enclosure : and sacred chants burst forth as she passed. At the moment

[1] Langlois, section ii, lecture i, hymnes iv and v. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol ii, p 17, verses 1–4

[2] " The Gāndhāra, which is identified with Candahar, was famous for its flocks " (Langlois' Note to above )

of the nuptial benediction, the priest announced the change in the young girl's destiny:

"I take her away from the paternal authority to place her in dependence upon her husband. May she be happy, O beneficent Indra, and have numerous children." [1]

The betrothed joined their hands, and the chief officiating priest reminded the woman of the religious obligations which the title of house-mistress conferred upon her. "May this spouse be happy," he said after the newly married bride had laid aside her maiden robes. "Approach her," he continued, speaking to the witnesses, "look at her, wish her well, and return to your homes" He then accepted the ornaments which she had just laid aside and purified her. The husband explained in a few words the moral object of marriage: "I take thy hand as pledge for our happiness; I wish thee to become my wife and to grow old with me." The priest adjured the young couple to remain ever attached to the joys of the family fireside: "Remain here; do not depart from it, but pass your lives together, happy in your home and playing with your children and grandchildren."

There is nothing more august in its simplicity than the speech of the husband to the wife: "May the Head of creation grant us a numerous race; May Aryaman [2] prolong our life. Enter under happy auspices the conjugal home May there be happiness in our home for both bipeds and quadrupeds."

"Come, O desired of the gods, beautiful one with the tender heart, with the charming look, good towards your husband, kind towards animals, destined to bring forth heroes. May there be happiness in our home for both bipeds and quadrupeds" The priest, raising his voice anew, in accents of ineffable sweetness and exquisite tenderness, called down for the last time the blessings of heaven upon the young wife.

"O generous Indra, make her fortunate. May she have a beautiful family, may she give her husband ten children! May he himself be like an eleventh!"

[1] Langlois, section viii, lecture iii, hymne xiv Hymn attributed to the daughter of Sâvitrî, one of the forms of the Sun. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, Edition 1888, vol vi, p 227, verse 25.

[2] One of the Adityas. "Mythological personages, twelve in number; they are the twelve forms of the Sun, regarded as the sons of Aditi"

"Reign with thy father-in-law; reign with thy mother-in-law; reign with the sisters of thy husband, reign with their brothers."

Could the majesty of marriage be better expressed than in this bridal song, the grave and tender solicitude of the bridegroom, the expansive kindness of the maiden extending even to animals, the wifely devotion and the dignity of womanhood?

When the Brahmanical society became constituted from the scattered elements in the Vedic family, the desire for a male issue was as strong as before; the motive only had altered.

To the sublime notion of the immortality of the soul had been added the desolating idea of the transmigration of souls. By a touching responsibility the Hindus believed in the power of their descendants to shorten their term of expiation after death, but only men had the right of granting this supreme satisfaction to the shades of their ancestors, by celebrating in their honour the funeral sacrifices It was then no longer the need for an increase to material strength which made the birth of a son so dear to the Indian, so bitter the birth of a daughter, but, the necessity of being delivered from the torments of a future life In default of an immediate male heir, a daughter's son could, it is true, be adopted by his grandfather, to whom be became Putra, "the saviour from hell", but there were great difficulties in persuading a son-in-law to comply with such a proposal, love for his father rebelling against it Did not Manu himself advise a man to avoid marrying a young girl who had no brother?

Manu, generally severe towards women, softened his language when counselling what name should be given to the newly born infant, and added as follows "Let that of a woman be easy to pronounce, soft, clear, agreeable, propitious, let it terminate in long vowels, and resemble words of benediction . . "[1] Do not these last words indicate the benevolent and consoling influence of women?

But in this code, filled with minute precepts on the way of rightly influencing the infancy of man, of the Dwija,[2] nothing

[1] Livre ii, sl 33 (See also Jones' *Laws of Manu*)

[2] "The word signifies *twice born, regenerate* They named dwija, every man of the three first classes, brāhman, kshattriva, or vaisya, who had been

proved that the legislator had preoccupied himself with the education of her, whose moral ascendancy he nevertheless recognized, and upon whom he imposed the future duty of bringing up sons.

The short time spent in her own family by the maiden, whose marriage was permitted before her eighth year, partly explains this silence. Already are pastoral occupations no longer the maiden's lot, though the name of *duhitri* still designates her; the epic poems initiate us into her elegant habits, the works of a more advanced civilization celebrate even the culture of her mind, the variety of her talents, and particularly her superiority in painting—in that art which amongst the Hindus has always remained in its infancy, but of which certain works possess an extreme delicacy of execution and remarkable freshness of colour.

In the account of the dramatic system of the Hindus, which precedes his translation of the Sanskrit Theatre, Wilson calls our attention to a remarkable peculiarity The Indian theatre was the only one in antiquity which allowed young girls of high birth to take part in the sketches of social life In those scenic representations of customs, found in the masterpieces of Kālidāsa and Bhavabhuti and sealed by their genius, they both figured and acted, and the character of the language employed, serves to accentuate the delicacy of mind and heart found in them.

Unfettered in their movements, they listened to the discourses of men, though decorum did not permit of their answering them directly. Sacuntalā and her friends, born in the forests, conversed, it is true, with king Dushmanta, but, as Wilson remarked, Mālatī [1] and Sāgarikā,[2] brought up in court etiquette, generally addressed their lovers through the medium of a third person, and hardly dared, so great was their reserve, to speak aloud before them to their companions. The imagination of Indian poets delighted in creating numerous maidenly types, a charming galaxy, having no equal in any other ancient literature. The epics and the dramatic works will make them known to us. Of these

invested with the sacred cord This investiture or initiation constituted the second birth of the dwijas." (Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, *Lois de Manu*)

[1] Heroine of one of Bhavabhuti's poems

[2] Heroine of a drama attributed to Srī Harsha Deva, king of Kashmir.

creations, gentle or severe, calm or exalted, but pure and gracious always, one has been recently revealed to us in the translation of several fragments of the Mahābhārata,[1] from the eloquent pen of one of our most learned Orientalists, M. Foucaux.

We will insert here the episode which introduces it, and which describes the heroism of filial devotion.

Agastya, the celebrated recluse, sung in the epic poems, devoted to contemplation and to asceticism, had not married. The shades of his ancestors appeared before him in the sad condition in which they were placed by their lack of posterity They told him in heart-rending terms, of the severity of their sufferings and supplicated him to rescue them by marrying. Agastya, the man of duty, consented But where could be found a wife worthy both of himself and of being his companion on his superhuman mission? He vainly sought for her. Like the sculptor, he then robbed every creature of one perfection, and therewith composed "an incomparable woman", to use the poet's expression

She was born in the palace of the king of Vidarbha; and the monarch, charmed with her infantine graces, summoned Brāhmans to her cradle, who named her Lopāmudrā. Vyāsa paints in striking colours the growth of the maiden girl "Gifted with supreme beauty," he says, "she grew up like a bunch of lotus in the water, and soon after became like a sparkling flame of fire" She was brought up with all the prestige of royalty. A hundred young girls and a hundred slaves waited and attended upon her "And," the poet continues, "while she was thus in the flower of youth, gifted with virtue and modesty, no man chose her for fear of the magnanimous Agastya And this maiden, loving truth, more beautiful than the Apsaras themselves, by her virtue rejoiced her father and her family"

Agastya judged the time had come for granting repose to the shades of his ancestors; and leaving his solitude, he came to the palace of Vidarbha and asked the king for his daughter's hand. The monarch shuddered at the idea of uniting the virgin adorned with all the charms of youth,

[1] The *Mahābhārata* Eleven episodes taken from this epic poem, translated for the first time from Sanskrit into French by Ph E Foucaux, Paris, 1862 Benjamin Dupran (See Ilvala and Vatapi)

reared amidst all the enjoyments of a princely life, to an austere recluse, inhabiting wild uncultivated forests; but the Brâhman's power, a power which even made Indra tremble, filled him with terror.

Distracted by this cruel alternative, he went to the queen, warned her of the danger which threatened their child, and added with dismay: "This great and powerful sage will, if irritated, consume me with the fire of his curse." Lopāmudrā heard that cry of anguish; the goodness of her heart dictated her duty. Coming forward she said

"Do not grieve because of me, king of the earth, give me to Agastya, and preserve thyself through me, O my father."

The marriage was celebrated At the command of the recluse the newly married wife replaced her sumptuous attire by penitential garments. She followed her husband to the forests, and found in the austere practice of good deeds, and in the holy love of Agastya, the reward for her noble sacrifice.

This story, which exalts the holiness of a marriage, which, later on became illegal, between a Brāhman and a Kshattriya's daughter, appears to belong to an epoch anterior to Manu.

Marriage, which was meant to perpetuate distinction between the castes, ran also the risk of confounding them, if permitted to become mixed. Struck by the danger which threatened to destroy the basis of the Brāhmanical constitution, Manu commanded the Hindu to marry only a woman of his own rank Strictly forbidding him to seek a companion in a caste higher than the one in which he hàd been born, he permitted him, in a second marriage, to marry a girl of an inferior caste to his own, and the children, offspring of these misalliances, formed those mixed classes on which the scorn of the legislator fell so cruelly [1]

The Swayamvara, or the choice of a husband, had remained the privilege of the Kshattriya's daughter. Sometimes, during the brilliant festivals of the tournament, she promised, like Penelope,[2] her hand to the wielder of a bow hard to bend,

[1] In the ancient Rāmâyana, when the young Brāhman Rishyasringa married the princess Santā, the father of Risyasringa purified his son because of his infraction of the law

[2] It is to M Ditandy that we owe this comparison between the queen of Ithaca and the princesses of India See his remarkable thesis on *Parallèle d'un épisode de l ancienne poésie indienne avec des poemes de l'antiquité classique*, Paris, 1856

and so became the prize of valour; or at others, in a festival assembly of warriors, like her sisters of Gaul, she designated him whose suit she would grant. In both these circumstances, she offered her own crown, not the Celtic cup, to her betrothed.

Many of these solemn occasions are celebrated in the annals of India; but in none has the Oriental imagination been better displayed than in the story of the Swayamvara of Draupadī, of which MM Pavie and Sadous have given us elegant translations[1] The Pāndavas, those fugitive princes, whose dramatic history is related in the Mahābhārata, wandering about under the guise of Brāhmans, were attracted towards Panchāla, by the announcement of the Swayamvara of its sovereign's daughter, the beautiful and intelligent Draupadī

Monarchs and princes were thronging into the royal residence, but to their luxury and power the king mentally contrasted the misery so heroically borne by the Pāndavas, of whose arrival in the capital he was ignorant Particularly was Arjun, the most sympathetic of the brothers, dear to him through his brilliant valour, and when he promised his daughter's hand to a warrior capable of handling a bow of prodigious strength, the vigour and address of the young prince were known to him An open space, decorated with triumphal arches, festoons, and garlands, was to serve as theatre for the exploits of the suitors The kings entered the palaces surrounding it—light and lofty constructions, whose white domes, surrounded by golden balustrades, covered with pearls, stood out well from the blue sky and reflected back the intense light of the East. They took their seats upon the thrones prepared for them in the scented buildings, resounding with the echo of instruments, while the Pāndavas hid themselves amongst the Brāhmans on the platforms where the people were thronging Fifteen days elapsed, and each day saw the sumptuous entertainments renewed On the sixteenth Draupadī appeared

The delicacy and regularity of her features, characteristic signs of the Aryan family, contrasted with the colour of her complexion, recalling that of the aborigines, were the cause of

[1] Fragments from the *Mahābhārata*, translated into French from the Sanskrit text of Calcutta, by Th Pavie, 1844 Fragments from the *Mahābhārata*, translated from the Sanskrit into French by A Sadous, 1858.

her being given the surname of Krishnā—the dark one. Covered with jewellery she entered the enclosure and with a royal gesture crowned her charming head with a golden wreath.

The oblation to fire began the ceremony. Drums beat, trumpets flourished; then everything was quiet, and Dhrishtadyumna, brother of Draupadī, holding his sister by the hand, advanced and showed to the suitors the object to be attained and the prize to be won. Presenting afterwards to the maiden the most part of those who solicited her hand, he added: "These and others in great number, kings of divers countries, Kshattriyas by birth, celebrated in the world, are assembled here because of thee, O happy one."

The lists were opened. Elated by Draupadī's beauty, the princes rushed inside, throbbing with hope, boiling with anger. It was no longer the solemn march of a kingly train, but the rapid, tumultuous, disorderly rush of rivals in presence of each other

"Krishnā for me," was their battle-cry. Vyāsa, faithful to the custom of the Indo-European races, who made deity to mingle actively in the struggles of mankind, described the gods as witnessing the scene and their war-chariots as ploughing the skies. The bow, however, fatigued the arms of the most robust and remained inflexible. At last Karna presented himself, the son of the Sun and of Kuntī, the brother also of the Pāndavas. But his mother alone knew his origin, and in the eyes of his brothers he was but the son of a charioteer, a Sūta.[1] Seizing the bow, he made it yield to his powerful grasp; but Draupadī, the noble daughter of the Kshattriyas, shuddered at the idea of staining the purity of her race. Scornfully she cried: "I do not choose the Sūta." The bow escaped from the hands of Karna, a bitter smile passed over his lips, and, lifting his eyes to the Sun, he seemed to invoke as witness the author of his birth.

Vain efforts succeeded the hero's attempt Suddenly Arjun descended into the arena. Great agitation followed this movement. Arjun's robe deceived all beholders. A Brāhman, how could he dare to compete in sports reserved for warriors? How, young and doubtless emaciated by

[1] The sūtas were the offspring of illegal marriages between Brāhmans and Kshattriyas

austerities, could he expose, by a probable failure, his sacred character to the jeers of the crowd? The raillery of some, the encouragement of others, did not ruffle Arjun's serenity. With the calm and confident assurance which knowledge of his strength inspires in a man, he seized the bow . . . and conquered. Heaven itself smiled at this exploit and shed flowers upon the young hero; the poets extolled his triumph. The melodious sounds of instruments and the songs of joy accompanying them mingled with the cries of rage from the defeated kings, cries of victory from the Brāhmans, delirious with joy and pride, and enthusiastic exclamations from the people. "Now," adds the epic author, "perceiving the object attained and regarding the victor as equal to Indra, Krishnā, bearing the white garland, approached the son of Kuntī with a smile, and Arjuna, receiving from her what he had gained in the lists, and saluted by the Brāhmans present, after accomplishing an unimaginable task, left the enclosure followed by his wife." [1]

Does not this picture recall to mind an age of chivalry entirely passed away, and apart from the local colouring, did not our Middle Ages often reproduce this scene from an Indian epic dating from three thousand years?

The marriage of Gopā with Siddhārtha, the prince who was to become the famous Buddha, was preceded by incidents which throw a bright light on the transformation that customs had undergone in the sixth century before our era, whilst still retaining certain traditions from the past

In his beautiful work on Buddha, and his religion, M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire has recalled this phase in the life of the great reformer The king Suddhōdana, father of Siddhārtha, had been observing with pain the irresistible vocation which impelled the inheritor of the crown towards the contemplative life, and when the principal elders of the Sākyas [2] supplicated him to prevent the imminent flight of the young man by choosing a wife for him, he consented, and sent them to plead with his son. Siddhārtha, after mature reflection, came to the conclusion that the duties of a married man might be joined to the severe occupations of a philosopher, and yielded. Already violating the Brāhmanical law, he declared

[1] Translation of M. Pavie.
[2] The king Suddhōdana belonged to the family of Sākyas.

himself willing to seek, even among Sûdras, a wife, gifted with the moral qualities that he required.

The *purohita*, the domestic priest attached to the royal family, sought in vain to compare the young persons who presented themselves before him with the ideal portrait traced by Siddhârtha. At last, a daughter of the Sâkyas, named Gopâ, ingenuously confessed that she believed herself to be the possessor of those virtues which should determine the prince's choice. She pleased Siddhârtha and the monarch, but the father of Gopâ, a witness to the apparent inaction of the inheritor of the throne, refused to accept him as his son-in-law, before having proved the talents which the prince was cultivating in the background.

"The royal youth," he said, "has lived in idleness in the midst of the palace; and it is a law in our family only to give our daughters to men clever in accomplishments, and never to those who are strangers to them"

He set up a competitive test, and Siddhârtha was obliged to enter the lists with five hundred young men of the Sâkyas.

This sort of Swayamvara had a higher character than the other ceremonies of the kind, whose memory the epic poems have preserved. The princes strove amongst themselves, not only with their physical address and power, but also with their learning and intelligence; and in bodily as well as mental exercises Siddhârtha conquered his rivals.

"The beautiful Gopâ," says M Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, "was the reward of his triumph, and the young girl who had believed herself worthy of a king, was declared the first of his wives"

The religious character of the Vedic marriage was modified in the Brâhmanical society While regarding marriages as indissoluble only if sanctioned by sacerdotal authority, and judging this consecration to be indispensable to the happiness of the married couples, Manu granted legal validity only to those betrothals contracted with the assent of the father or brother of the young girl

But the primitive customs of the Aryans were shown in the repulsion which the purchase of a wife inspired in their descendants. Amongst the eight ways of marrying enunciated by Manu, the legislator attributed to evil spirits, marriage based on a sale; permitting the father, nevertheless, to

accept from his son-in-law one or two couples of animals destined either to be sacrificed to the gods or to be given back to his daughter, he placed under the patronage of the Saints the alliance that followed on such a homage

Of the marriage rites of Brahma, of the Creators, of the Gandharvas or celestial musicians, and of the Rakshasas or Giants, interesting illustrations are found in the epic poems. The most august of all was that of Brahma; the legislator placed it even above divine marriage, in which even during a sacrifice, the father would give his daughter to the officiating priest. According to the rite of Brahma, the father, after having presented his daughter with a dress and ornaments, united her to the learned, religious man to whom he had offered her of his own accord. This marriage recalled that of Kakshīvān and Romasā, which we quoted in the Vedic period According to a legend relatively modern, the same rite was used at the first marriage celebrated on earth between the saintly anchorite Kardama and that Dēvahūti whose divine maternity we have related elsewhere.[1]

Kardama was living in his hermitage, adoring Bhāgavat, the god who had promised to choose him for his father in this world, when Manu Śwāyambhuva, the first man, the first king, visited him, surrounded by his family and after nobly praising him, addressed to him these supplicating words:

"Deign, O recluse, to listen with compassion to the discourse of an unhappy father whose heart is tormented by the affection that he has for his daughter

"She whom you see here is my daughter, the sister of Priyavrata and Uttānapāda; she seeks a husband who may be her equal in age, in merit, and in character.

She had no sooner learnt from Nārada what were thy merits, the knowledge that thou hadst of the Veda, thy beauty, thy youth, thy character, than her heart fixed itself on thee

"Accept then, chief of the Brāhmans, this wife whom I offer to thee with faith, for she is capable of assisting thee in a suitable manner in the duties of house-master" [2]

She was truly worthy of the virtuous Kardama, the pure young girl thus attracted by moral beauty The anchorite recognized in her the companion announced to him by Vishnu,

[1] See chap i

[2] *Bhāgavata Purāna*, book iii, chap xxii.

he accepted with respect the honour of her alliance, and a smile of happiness illuminated his severe countenance. After the marriage and after the gifts lavished upon the young couple by the mother of Dēvahūti, came the hour of separation, the anguish of which has been described by the poet with the most touching expression :

"After having given his daughter to a man worthy of her, the monarch, freed from all anxiety, pressed her in his arms, his heart agitated with regret at leaving her. But incapable of parting with her, he shed tears repeatedly, crying out. 'Dear child, O thou whom I love!' and bathing his daughter's hair in the tears which fell from his eyes."

How true is this—a father's grief on leaving behind, perhaps for ever, the child whom his love had ceaselessly protected! And how naturally mingled with this bitterness is the innate satisfaction of having by this cruel sacrifice assured a future for which he was responsible!

The rite of the Creators (or Prajāpatis) was accompanied by incidents of less intimate charm perhaps, but of a more imposing character. "The nuptial rite called Prājāpatya is," Manu says, "when a father gives away his daughter to a suitable man, saying: 'May both of you perform together your civil and religious duties.'" [1]

The hero of the Rāmāyana was thus united to the daughter of the king of Videha [2] When Rāma won by his valour the hand of the beautiful Sītā, he dared not contract the marriage without his father's assent, nor offer the libations of water prescribed by the betrothal rite Because of the resolution so clearly expressed by the prince whose attachment to duty was to render him illustrious, Janaka, the sovereign of Videha, did not hesitate, dispatching an embassage to the king of Ayodhyā, Dasaratha, Rāma's father, he prayed his future ally to sanction by his presence the union of their two children and to come accompanied by his Brāhmans and escorted by his army

Dasaratha repaired with alacrity to the Vaidehan court, the saint Vasistha, interpreter to the kings of Ayodhyā in what concerned legal duties and Janaka, speaking also in his own name, both declared the ancient race and the equal

[1] Book iii, sloka 30

[2] Videha is the present province of Tirhut

nobility of the betrothed couple; the marriages of a sister and the two cousins of Sītā with Rāma's three brothers were now decided upon; the sacrifice to the ancestral shades was performed by the king of Ayodhyā; and the wedding day now arrived. The nuptial ceremony exhibited a curious peculiarity. Dasaratha—walking in the train of his Brāhmans, accompanied by his four sons who had already bowed their heads on receiving the benedictions previous to marriage—dared not cross the threshold of the palace of his new ally

"We have come," he said to the Vaidehan monarch, "raja, on whose head may happiness rain, we have come to thee to celebrate the marriages. Grant us, having attentively considered the facts, an entrance into thy house. All, as long as we are here, ourselves and our relations, are at thy command Proceed, as the dignity of thy race requires, in all the details of the nuptial ceremony."

"Oh!" answered Janaka, astonished, "What guards detain thee at my doors? Whose orders but thine are obeyed here? What hesitation dost thou feel when thou art at home? Fear nothing! Already on the spot where the sacrifice will be celebrated, vowed to felicity by formulas from which joy emanates, have arrived my four virgins, resplendent like living flames I am ready and I wait, standing by the side of these altars, O great prince! Remove every obstacle, Indra of kings. For what reason dost thou delay?"[1]

The king of Ayodhyā and his train advanced The ceremony now acquired a more touching and solemn character The poet understood the emotion of the moment in which the father, surrendering his rights over his daughters, reminded his sons-in-law of the impressive duties of their new situation There was in the words of the king of Videha a mingling of tenderness and majesty admirably appropriate to this august ceremony He first addressed Rāma. "Be thou the first to approach the altar Here is my daughter Sītā who will become thy companion in all the obligations of life Take her hand in thy hand, O prince, the joy of Raghu."[2] The monarch united successively the four couples: "Noble

[1] The Rāmāyana *Adikānda* translated by M Val-Parisot, chap lxxv
[2] One of the ancestors of Rāma

princes," he said, "now united to wives of your rank, accomplish everything, be faithful to the holy and worthy observances of your race, and to the obligations incumbent upon you; and may every felicity be upon your head."

The religious consecration concluded the ceremony. Whilst the sons of Dasaratha joined hands with their wives, a Brāhman pronounced the words of benediction over the four couples;[1] then all the newly married, approaching the hearth, saluted Agni three times. Here again, with the artless enthusiasm of the first ages, the poet caused the marriage rites to be even celebrated in heaven: "It appeared," he said, "that for the marriages of the chiefs of Raghu everything became marvellous."

After the departure of the four couples, and while Dasaratha was still the guest of Janaka, fairy gifts were remitted to him by the king of Videha. Herds, chariots, coined gold, ingots, precious stones, and costly robes, testified to an epoch in which luxury already added its influence to that of power, whilst the gift of a prodigious number of cows recalled the pastoral occupations of the Aryans.

Two forms of marrying were permitted to the warrior caste of Kshattriyas, that of the Gandharvas, a union formed without witnesses by the mutual vows of the betrothed, and that of the Rākshasas, the marriage by rape.

The first of these rites served as a foundation for the legend of Sacuntalā, so poetically related in the Mahābhārata. This episode, several centuries after, inspired Kālidāsa with a drama of exquisite sentiment and of consummate art. It is generally agreed with our illustrious poet, M. de Lamartine,[2] that in the original there is found a more heroic character and a more vigorous touch. The court of Vikramāditya, the refinements of a civilization arrived at maturity, are reflected in Kālidāsa's work; the luxuriant growth of Nature in India, the customs of the Aryan at the same time both tender and sweet, in short, the powerful inspiration of the first

[1] The ceremony of joining hands is appointed for those who marry women of their own class . . . "By a *Kshattriya* on her marriage with a Brāhman, an arrow must be held in her hand; by a *Vaisya* woman, with a bridegroom of the sacerdotal or military class, a whip, and by a *Sudra* bride, marrying a priest, a soldier, or a merchant, must be held the skirt of a mantle." *Lois de Manu*, livre iii, sl. 44.

[2] As the sequel of his translation of the *Reconnaissance de Sacountalā*.

ages animated the recital of the epic poet and communicated to it an inexpressible attraction.

This legend has lately been translated with infinite charm by M. de Chézy ; but we will especially follow here the more literal version given by M Nève in his brilliant studies of women in the Mahābhārata.[1] At the commencement of the episode, Dushyanta, a prince renowned for prowess and equity, was engaged in hunting, a pursuit which, in the forests of his kindgom, inhabited by ferocious animals, was on account of its danger, of peculiar attraction.

We will not follow Vyāsa [2] into scenes of carnage in which the roaring of the lions answered the menacing uproar of the royal hunt. The picture changes and we enter with Dushyanta into a second forest, where is displayed one of those landscapes of which the pen of an Indian poet can alone reproduce the lovely colouring. Here, the pippul, the fig-tree of the pagodas, and the tree of the Banians, the fig-tree of Bengal, shooting widely its boughs and branches and re-implanting them in the soil, form those immense groves vaulted overhead with leaves, fruits, and flowers, which soften the dazzling rays of the tropical sun Farther on, on the banks of a river down which were swans swimming majestically, a smiling grove displayed the hermitage of the great anchorite, Kanwa, a refuge for piety and science, the calmness of which was only disturbed by the murmur of prayer and by the still softer voices of Nature. The monarch, deliciously impressed with the peaceful beauty of the scene, entered the house of the recluse Kanwa did not reply to his call, but a young girl, whose charms were not hidden by the valkala, the bark dress of penitents, appeared before the surprised gaze of Dushyanta In her father's absence she discharged with the most amiable modesty the duties of hospitality towards the stranger, whose superior rank she had recognized. The king plied her with questions Why was the world robbed of her, living thus, in a forest and a hermitage ?

The young girl related the story of her birth to him. Daughter of the nymph Menakā and of Visvāmitra, who had

[1] *Des portraits de femmes dans la poésie épique de l'Inde* Fragments d'études morales et littéraires sur le Mahābhārata, by Felix Nève, 1858

[2] The poet to whom is attributed the compilation of the *Vedas* and the composition of the *Mahābhārata*

quitted the warlike career of the Kshattriya for the contemplative life of the Brāhman, she had been abandoned in the woods by her mother. Her first cradle had been a bed of verdure, scented with flowers, the trees interlaced had thrown their shadows over the infant and sheltered her with their dark foliage; the birds, the Sacuntas,[1] had lulled her to sleep with their songs and fanned her with their wings

Kanwa saw the forsaken child near his hermitage; he lifted her in his arms, and in memory of the Sacuntas he called their little nurseling Sacuntalā The austere anchorite lovingly occupied himself with the education of his adopted daughter As she grew up Sacuntalā shed the radiancy of youth over the stern home and lavished upon Kanwa a grateful and respectful love. Dushyanta only saw but one detail in this narration Sacuntalā was of the Kshattriya race. "According to thy language, O excellent maid, it is plain that thou art the daughter of a king; be my wife, gracious maid, and tell me what I must do for thee This very day will I bring thee a necklace of gold, rich robes, ear-rings, sparkling with gold, and the rarest of precious stones brought from far-off countries, jewels, graceful ornaments for the bosom, as well as rich furs Consent to be my wife and the whole of my kingdom shall belong to thee Unite, timid virgin, unite thy days with mine by the nuptial tie of the Gandharvas, for of all the ways of tying the marriage knot, that of the Gandharvas is reputed the best"

Sacuntalā supplicated the prince to wait for Kanwa's arrival Without the assent of her benefactor she would not contract a union, which he would doubtless approve and joyfully consecrate. The king persisted in his resolution. "A soul," he said, "unites itself by love to another; a soul finds refuge in another, a soul gives itself to another; such is the rule traced out for thee by the divine law" Sacuntalā yielded but on one condition; the son born of their marriage should be heir to the throne The king promised everything, and the betrothed joined their hands under the eyes of the gods.

Dushyanta quitted his young wife after having promised to send for her with due solemnity. Sacuntalā remained alone,

[1] The name Sacuntalā is derived from Sacunta This bird is a vulture

troubled in mind. For the first time she dreaded her father's return, for the first time she did not run to meet the old man, to relieve him of his burden of fruit. But Kanwa arrived, smiling and inspired: "Happy one," he said to her, "the union which thou hast contracted thyself to-day without consulting me has nothing contrary to the divine law. Certainly, the marriage named Gandharva, is the most suitable for the order of warriors

. . . . . .

"Dushyanta, whom thou hast taken for thy husband, O Sacuntalā, is the best of men, gifted with religious virtue and with greatness of soul. Thy son, chief of a great race, renowned for his strength, will have in his power the whole world, to which the Ocean serves as a limit."

Reassured and joyous, Sacuntalā lavished upon her benefactor those caressing attentions which at first she dared not give him. She prayed the holy anchorite to bless him to whom she had plighted her troth, and when Kanwa, acceding to her desire, left to her the choice of the blessing that he should grant the monarch, the noble young wife desired that the royal race, happy always, might be ever faithful to their duty.

But long days passed by and the king did not return. A son was born to Sacuntalā, and displayed, as he grew up, the heroic bent of mind of his race. Kanwa then decided to have the mother recognized by the title of queen and the child by that of young king.[1]

The disciples of Kanwa accompanied Sacuntalā and her son to Hastināpura, the residence of Dushyanta; they conducted her to the palace, introduced her at the public audience of the sovereign, and, judging their mission accomplished, and believing that the happiness of the daughter of their spiritual master was assured, they returned to the hermitage. Meanwhile, Sacuntalā reminded the king of his promises, but to this woman holding a child in her arms, and saluting him by the names of husband and of father, Dushyanta only answered by one word. "I do not remember."

With flashing look and trembling lip, Sacuntalā, distracted by sorrow, but exalted by her indignation, addressed the

[1] Sanskrit *juvarāja*, i.e. heir-apparent

monarch with the authority of the ascetic and the majesty of wifehood: "Thou who knowest the truth, O great king, how is it that thou darest maintain without fear that thou knowest me not, as only a vulgar man of low feelings would do? . . . Thou hast perhaps thought that I am alone; but thou knowest not what Conscience is, this sage of ancient days, who has knowledge of every evil action, and in presence of whom thou committest this iniquity. The man who does wrong excuses himself by saying. 'No one sees me.' But the gods see him, and his own judge, the interior man, sees him also"

We will not quote here the admirable discourse put by the poet in the mouth of his heroine, having for its object the glorification of Woman, in the study especially dedicated to the Wife we shall recall those pages which eloquently express the veneration of the Hindu for the mother of his children

Dushyanta appeared insensible to the severe, passionate, and moving accents of Sacuntalā. Vainly endeavouring to detect in him a spark of paternal love, she held towards him the child with its sweet smile and artless loving gaze Dushyanta laughed insultingly at her. "I do not acknowledge the son whom thou has brought into the world, Sacuntalā. Women have as their portion the art of pretence; who would put faith in thy language? I do not acknowledge thee; leave me" . . .

. . . . .

In the name of Truth the young wife adjured the king to renounce his persistent denials of her. "A True Word!" she said. "One might doubt, O prince, if it does not equal in efficacy the reading of the entire Vedas or the custom of bathing in the holy places of pilgrimage Truth is the first of virtues . . Truth is the supreme Brahma . . . Ah, do not violate, O king, that sovereign law . . . hold thyself bound to the sincerity of thy promises. But if thou remainest fast by the untruth, if thou becomest faithless to sworn faith, I depart instantly, I retire of myself; for no one would ever approach a man such as thou art . . . Learn besides, Dushyanta, even without thy assistance, will my son reign one day over the world which extends its frontiers to the four seas, and which has for a crown the glorious Meru, the king of the mountains."

After this proud defiance, Sacuntalā was turning away . . . A voice which did not belong to earth stopped her . . . The gods were bearing witness for her. "Protect thy son, O Dushyanta," the voice was saying, "protect thy son and honour his mother Sacuntalā has spoken the truth; thou art the father of this infant; and as it is by our intervention that he will grow up under the shelter of thy throne, thou shalt give him the name of Bharata (the protected one)." [1]

Then the king giving vent to his emotion, which from the beginning of the scene he had endeavoured to check, exclaimed with joy: "Listen, O sage men, to the language spoken to me by the envoy of the gods. This child I, even I, acknowledge him for my son But if I had immediately received him as my son, on the simple word of his mother, my people might perhaps have conceived some doubts on his birth; this son might perhaps never have been pure in their eyes" [2]

Drawing to his heart the child now restored to him, he drank deeply of the first ineffable joys of paternity, then addressing Sacuntalā he said · "Our engagement was unknown to my people, all my conduct until now has been with the object of worthily divulging it before all eyes Now the people know that thou art united to me by the title of wife To this child, to our son, belongs the right of succession to the throne, it is with that object that I have always acted. The hard words which thou hast addressed to me in an impulse of anger, I forgive them to thee who lovest me, beloved wife, gracious woman, whose large eyes have such charms"

Notwithstanding the happy ending to this legend, the scenes which we have just sketched, prove how easily such bonds could be denied, which were contracted without witnesses, and without any civil or religious consecration At times, as in the rape of Rukminī,[3] this mode of marrying was confounded with the Rākshasic rite.

Rukminī was the daughter of the king of Vidarbha. She was a perfect beauty and her noble and proud spirit was filled

[1] Translation of M de Chézy

[2] Translation of M Felix Nève

[3] This episode of the *Bhâgavata Purâna* has been brilliantly translated by M Langlois See *Monuments littéraires de l'Inde ou Mélanges de littérature sanscrite*, 1827

with the most gracious aspirations. She had often heard extolled the glory of Krishna, the avatār of Vishnu. She had never seen the hero; but, because she loved valour, she loved him. The Indian poet had previously made Rukminī an incarnation of Lakshmī, Vishnu's wife Unconscious of her divine origin, she nevertheless felt drawn in this world towards the god, who in heaven was her husband. Krishna also, captivated by the pure fame of Rukminī, had asked for the hand of the maiden, and the king of Vidarbha had joyfully acceded to his wish, but a rival presented himself in Sisupāla, prince of Chedi; he was supported by Rukminī's brother Rukmin, and the king of Vidarbha yielded regretfully to his son's influence. Deprived of the effective support of her father, but encouraged by his tacit consent, Rukminī resolved to appeal to the courageous affection of the man for whom he had erewhile destined her. Calling to her side a Brāhman, she charged the holy minister with a mission for Krishna. In a letter at once imperious and tender, she imparted to the hero her brother's intentions and summoned him to defend his betrothed wife.

She told him of the prayers she had addressed to the gods, the austerities which she had observed, and all the pious acts she had done in order to claim the protection of heaven for her wishes. She announced that her marriage with the prince of Chedi was fixed for the morrow: he might carry her away during the ceremony, but he must respect her parents and not threaten them with a sacrilegious sword.

Led away by the energetic and passionate expression of feelings which answered to his own, Krishna flew to Vidarbha.

Everything in the town breathed of joy; the streets were strewn with flowers, decorated with triumphal arches, and scented with perfumes; the inhabitants had dressed their houses with flags and banners; the invocations to the gods and to the ancestral shades had been pronounced; the Brāhmans had received the honours due to their rank and had added to the ornaments of the betrothed, bandlets containing prayers written with their own hands and copied from their sacred books A sacrifice had been celebrated. A warlike movement animated the festival. Neighbouring kings, guessing of Krishna's intention, had hastened to lend

their assistance to Sisupāla, and horsemen, foot soldiers, chariots, elephants, mingled in the joyous crowd. Meanwhile, Rukminī, anxious and with a throbbing heart, began to despair of escape. The hours were passing and neither the Brāhman nor Krishna had appeared She thought herself scorned.

" I am not loved, I have no protector," she said to herself bitterly. The Brāhman's arrival put an end to her anguish . he announced Krishna's presence in the town. The prince and his brother were received by the king with courteous deference the people who pressed around them admired Krishna, the god-king " May he receive," they cried, " may he take the hand of Rukminī "

Through the midst of that tumult the princess proceeded to the temple of Pārvatī A sudden agitation seized her : and she felt in her heart the presence of Krishna But she controlled herself , and advancing to the sound of instruments, and beating of drums, surrounded by the women of her court, by warriors of imposing appearance, receiving the most flattering homage, she arrived at the temple · there she prayed , but not for the marriage prepared by her brother : she besought the goddess to bless the scheme which should break it off After laying her offering at the feet of Pārvati, lavishing gifts upon the wives of the Brāhmans, and receiving sacred offerings from them, she quitted the temple, her hand resting upon a friend's shoulder, and as she appeared before the eyes of the crowd in her splendid beauty, all hearts flew to her.

The kings, come to defend Sisupāla, let their weapons fall, and rushing forward, bent their knees before her. Rukminī had foreseen that moment :

" She, however, had only one goal in view, and slowly approached it , it was not long before her gaze fell upon the divine Krishna, now close to her. Parting with her fingers the curls which half veiled the fire of her eyes, she fixed them in turn upon the princes whom she had captivated and upon the hero who was her conqueror At last Krishna took her, placed her on his chariot, and carried her off, before the very eyes of the enemies, whose powerless chakra he braved." [1]

[1] " The chakra is an instrument in the form of a disk or a wheel The edge is sharp and cutting , this weapon is thrown into the midst of armed battalions and drawn back by means of a strap The god Vishnu, in one of his four hands, holds a disk, which also represents the sun." *Harivansa*, note by M Langlois.

He, the ravisher, disdained flight ; his chariot rolled on majestically, protected by the warriors of Balarāma.

Stupor had taken hold of the kings, but their re-awakening was like that of the lion They pursued Krishna, their swift and numerous arrows flying through the air. Rukminī was frightened. Calm and smiling, the hero reassured her. Both attack and defence were, however, terrible. The poet drew a striking picture of that contest, in pages which might have been inspired by the heroic spirit of Homer. The god disperses his enemies

"Only Sisupāla," adds the Bhāgavata-Purāna, "furious at seeing his betrothed carried away, persisted against their advice in his resolution to conquer or die." He was at last persuaded to desist, and was dragged far away from the field of battle. The struggle, however, was not yet ended. Rukmin returned with a second army From afar, he threatened and insulted Krishna, but his words had no more the power to irritate the unmoved soul of the hero than his arrows were able to reach the invulnerable body

A desperate struggle began. Krishna was on the point of killing his brother-in-law He stopped . His young wife was at his feet, sullying her forehead in the dust, more powerful than ever in her weakness and in her tears.

She had disarmed the conqueror. The gaze of Krishna fell upon her with gentle pity. Rukmin shall not die, but sentenced to an ignominious chastisement he shall henceforth live dishonoured

Such were generally the sad consequences of unions tolerated by law, but not made legitimate by the indefeasible rights of morality, the same everywhere and always

# CHAPTER III

## THE WIFE, THE MOTHER, THE WIDOW. THE WIFE'S DEATH

The Aryans, the wife Her influence hymn to the god of gambling. Monogamy almost general The mother The widow hymn to the god of death

The Brāhmanical society the wife in the code of Manu The legislator dreads her ascendancy episode of Diti in the *Bhāgavata-Purāna*. Glorification of the virtuous woman a maxim of Manu, a passage from the *Harivansa* and the discourse of Sacuntalā Principal cause of repudiation Polygamy Jealousy in the gynæceum episode of Chitrakētū The mother Exalted by Manu The poets understood her admirably The widow of Srigāla confiding her son to the murderer of her husband The widow in the laws of Manu Rules concerning the sacrifice of the widow, fragment from a Purāna The widow of Prithu The wife's death Duties imposed on the widower by Manu Lamentations of Aja on the death of Indumatī

THE wife! The wife in ancient India! With what a shining aureole is she crowned there! From the hymns of the Veda to the elegies of Vikramāditya's contemporaries, what productions of Sanskrit literature have not celebrated her! Such names as Sītā, Damayantī, Sāvitrī, heroines of conjugal tenderness, have inspired the epic poets with their most living creations [1] What were the customs and the laws

[1] Let M le baron Guerrier de Dumast speak here In the notes which accompany his " Fleurs de l'Inde ", of which he has made such a charming nosegay, after alluding to Sītā and Damayantī, he adds " The existence of the two princesses of whom we are speaking, is not certain, someone will say perhaps

" The question is to understand one another Their individual existence at a given moment precisely according to the legend *mon Dieu*, let it be so Each one may dispute that at his will But their general existence to call *that* in question is impossible It is that which is wanted

" Neither designed—neither dreamt of even by the Greeks or by the Romans, who had never risen to such heights neither suspected, we say, by Homer or even by Virgil, feminine types of such elevation, such delicacy, such purity of sentiment, could not have been conceived any more by the great Sanskrit epic writers, if these had not met on the banks of the Ganges, what did not exist either by the shores of the Meles or of the Tiber, if these had not found in the Hindu society of their time the necessary lineaments and colours to compose and describe similar figures To believe the contrary is to stupidly forget that man does not possess the powers of the Supreme Author, and that he could not, like the Creator, make something out of nothing Such inventors, we might say, would be more astonishing than their heroines "

which developed the admirable types and prepared the acts of devotion revealed to us in their sublime delicacy in the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata? The religious rights of woman amongst the Aryans testified to the elevated rank which she occupied in the Vedic family. We have seen her participating in the ceremonies of family worship and directing the religious instruction of her children. Elsewhere, in the study consecrated to the young girl and to marriage, the nuptial hymn of Sūrya showed us the woman as queen in her home. The titles of chief, *pati*, of master of the house, *grihapati*, attributed to the husband, expressed not tyranny but protection; and the wife, she, also, called *patni*, *grihapatni*, shared with her husband the privileges of an authority of which he only spared her the dangers.

Her functions, indeed, did not call her to those fields of battle where civilization clashed with barbarism, and where the Arya preluded the conquest of India, but it was she who, before the battle, offered the warrior the ambrosia drunk alike by gods and heroes.

"If the martial Arya foresees the approach of his enemy," sang the Veda, "and if the moment of combat has come, let his wife, accompanied by those who pour the soma, give orders that this generous liquor be prepared"[1]

In those ancient times, woman appeared as the worthy companion of the hero, and the Arya excited himself to valorous deeds by the thought of her who after the victory would proudly lean on his victorious arm.

"All women," exclaimed Indrānī, "are charmed by the courage and glory of the husbands who love them. A beautiful bride is happy, when she gives public homage to her well-beloved."[2] Everywhere bursts forth in the Vedic hymns the sympathetic respect of the Arya for woman.

"He (Agni) in the home, resembles a faithful wife in her house. he beautifies everything"[3]

Did the Arya desire to describe to the gods the ardour of his prayer, his confidence in their goodness; did he desire

[1] Langlois, *Rig-Veda*, section iii, lecture vi, hymne vi Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol iii, p 169, verse 8 Trübner's edition, 1888

[2] Langlois, section vii, lecture vii, hymne ix. Wilson, vol. vi, p. 69. verse 12.

[3] Langlois, section i, lecture v, hymne v. Wilson, vol i, p 179, verse 3.

to draw down their benediction on his vows; did he desire to remind them of their love for him? The mutual relationship of husband and wife furnished him with his favourite comparisons.

"I invoke him," said he to Indra, "with the tenderness which a husband has for his wife . . ." [1]

"He (Atri) [2] invokes you and prays to you with the faith which a wife has in her husband . . ." [3]

"Accept our offerings, listen to our prayers; be to us what a husband is to his young wife . . " [4]

"Love our prayer, as the husband loves his wife . . ." [5]

"Love our voices, as the husband loves the voice of a well-beloved wife." [6]

"Thou lovest us, as a wife loves her husband " [7]

The Arya attributed to woman a gentle and beneficent influence; he believed that in the intimacy of a virtuous marriage a man could purify himself from his faults, and embrace a new existence. The hymn to the god of gambling [8] worthily describes the ascendancy of the wife. A man who possessed in his household all the elements of happiness was a victim to the fatal passion of gambling so deeply engrafted in the Hindus He felt his guilt and repented, and yet he could not conquer himself.

His wife suffered in silence and did not cease to lavish upon the guilty one all the tokens of an affectionate solicitude. At the sight of that silent suffering, of that unalterable patience, of that forgiving kindness, he expressed his remorse with emotion ·

"I have a wife who has against me neither anger nor a hard word. She is as good to my friends as to me, her husband Such is the devoted wife whom I neglect in order to tempt fortune!"

[1] Langlois, section iii, lecture vi, hymne ii Wilson, vol iii, p 160, verse 5.

[2] Atri, sage

[3] Langlois, section iv, lecture iv, hymne xvi Wilson, vol iii, p 366, verse 4 (The poet addresses himself to the Aswins)

[4] Langlois, section iii, lecture iii, hymne xiii Wilson, vol iii, p 82, verse 5

[5] Langlois, section iii, lecture iv, hymne vii Wilson, vol iii, p 110, verse 8 (The poet addresses himself to Pushan, one of the forms of Agni)

[6] Langlois, section iii, lecture vi, hymne xiv Wilson, vol iii, p 184, verse 16 (The poet addresses himself to Indra)

[7] Langlois, section vii, lecture iii, hymne vii Wilson, vol v, p 336, verse 4

[8] Langlois, section vii, lecture viii, hymne ii. Wilson, vol vi, p 91 sq.

A painful thought seized him . . . Already his wife's family despised him, and his wife might perhaps become tired of suffering for him . . . " I will no longer," he cried, " be made miserable by these dice " But his friends allured him ; the sight of the seductive dice did the rest . . . He played, and played again. In a struggle described in the hymn with accents of strange energy, the gambler completed his ruin. It was night. The unhappy one returned home, mad with despair, distracted with terror, pursued by a creditor ; " the thought of committing robbery has come to him," added the poet with sombre reflection. " On seeing his wife again," continued the sacred author, " he reflects that other wives are happy, that other homes are fortunate ! "

The dawn awoke nature ; with her rose the gambler and the rays of the sun again fell on him, bent over the infernal dice But when night came, he dared not re-enter the conjugal roof, but stretched his worn-out limbs upon the bare earth.

Then a sudden change came over him ; he turned away from the precipice about to engulf him. From henceforth he should seek happiness in the peaceful joys of the domestic hearth and in the hard labours of a life in the fields.

" O gambler," he exclaims, with the authority of a sad experience, " do not touch the dice ! Work rather on the land, and enjoy wealth that will be the fruit of thy wisdom."

The importance of the wife's part was an obstacle to polygamy : and though it was not a precept, yet monogamy was the condition of the greater number. The want, however, of male posterity was destined to lead to the plurality of wives, but as M. Émile Burnouf [1] judiciously remarks, the second wife having a right to the same rank as the first, the priestly head of the family not being able to extend to many wives the religious privileges of house-mistress, and the ordinary man not being able to sustain the ruinous luxury of a gynæceum, the nobles, to whom this latter inconvenience mattered little, and who had not maintained their spiritual rights, alone escaped the general rule.

Maternity alone completed wifehood, and a mother was an object of veneration ; " The mother of a son," exclaimed

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[1] See the *Essai sur le Véda*

Indrânî, "deserves honour." [1] In his prayer the Arya united with equal tenderness the names of those to whom he owed his existence: "Spare both him and her who have given us birth, O Rudra; abstain from striking the persons who are dear to us." [2] Elsewhere the hymn recalled the mother's passionate solicitude, the instinct by which the child felt drawn towards her who alone could understand it, and the respect when, grown up, he would show her :—

"Her servants are like sons brought up in the same house, and whom a virtuous wife as well as her husband, cherish equally.[3]

"May Aditi receive me as a mother receives her son and may my prayer go straight to her heart to abide there [4]

"As mothers care for their nurselings, so do Heaven and Earth follow thee with solicitude, O vigorous and redoubtable Indra! [5]

"The generous and magnificent Soma, unites himself as tenderly to the waters, as a nurseling attaches itself to its mother.[6]

"Sporting like young children under the eye of a good mother

"Like children who submit themselves to their mother" [8]

In the Vedic idiom the mother is called *Mâtri* Here again, the *Essai sur le Véda* gives us the most precise information about her duties In the root which formed her name and which generally expressed a gift, M Burnouf saw the nature of her attributes · "The mother," he said, "appears thus for her principal part to have been the distributor of blessings

[1] Section viii, lecture iv, hymne i Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol vi, p 234, verse 10

[2] Section i, lecture viii, hymne ii Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol i, p 303, verse 7

[3] Section i, lecture v, hymne xii Wilson's *Rig Veda* ed 1888, vol i, p 195, verse 3 (The poet speaks of Agni)

[4] Section iv, lecture ii, hymne x Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol iii, p 303, verse 2

[5] Section vi, lecture vii, hymne ii. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol v, p 202, verse 6

[6] Section vii, lecture iv, hymne iii Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol v, p. 362, verse 2.

[7] Section viii, lecture iii, hymne vii. Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol vi, p 211, verse 6 (The poet speaks of Maruts)

[8] Section iv, lecture vi, hymne iv Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed 1888, vol iii, p 424, verse 8

of every sort, sent by the gods or won by the father; such as nourishment, clothing, and, in general, everything that could contribute to satisfy the first needs of a growing society."

Thus the mother outlived the wife.

When the Arya, worn out by battle, terminated his active and warlike existence, his relations and friends crowded round his corpse and from his tomb arose the hymn of death.

In a funeral chant which the Veda has preserved for us,[1] the poet, struck with terror, conjured Mrityu, the god of death, to reap no more victims. The Arya, worshipper of life, could hardly understand its cessation; and before the inanimate body of his companion in war, before a family in tears, his thoughts reverted, with a sudden reaction, to the noisy pleasures of this world: "Life and death succeed each other. May the invocation which we address to the gods to-day be propitious Let us abandon ourselves to mirth and to the happiness of the dance and thus prolong our existence."

But the tomb was half-open . . .

"Rise," said the officiating priest to the relations of the dead, "gather round him whom time has struck down and according to your age make efforts to bear him to the grave."

Those women who had not experienced the bitter pain of widowhood then advanced, bearing their offerings: "Allow these virtuous women to approach with their oil and butter, these women who still possess their husbands. Exempt from tears and ills, decked with jewels, let these gather before the fire"

Then the priest, in grave and kind tones, addressed the widow in language marked by a gentle authority. Reminding her strongly of her duties as a mother, he gave the highest consecration to her devotion as a wife: "And thou woman, return to the place where thou mayest still find life awaiting thee. Find, in the children whom he leaves to thee, the one who is no longer. Thou hast been the worthy spouse of the master to whom thou gavest thine hand."

The fingers of the dead man still grasped his lately victorious arms. The priest disengaged them and said with melancholy: "See what thou art come to . . ." Again he repelled sad

[1] Section vii, lecture vi, hymne xiii Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, ed. 1888, vol v. pp. 46–9.

thoughts and sang once more on the closing tomb the hymn of life: "And we here present, may we become men of courage and overcome all our proud enemies."

The earth would soon swallow the corpse, and the officiating priest, bidding him an eternal farewell, hoped that the earth might lie lightly upon him: "Go, seek the Earth, this wise and good mother. O Earth, rise up, do not hurt his bones; be kind and gentle to him. O Earth, cover him, as a mother covers her infant with the skirts of her garment . . . The days are for me what the arrows are for the feathers they carry away. I restrain my voice as the bridle restrains the charger."

How far removed was this scene of resignation from the suicide of the Indian woman upon her husband's pyre!

Will the Brāhmanical society preserve to the wife her dignity, to the mother her authority; lastly, to the widow her life?

"Married women," said Manu, "must be honoured with attention and by presents from their fathers, their brothers, their husbands, and from the brethren of their husbands, when these desire abundant prosperity."[1]

"Wherever females are honoured, there the divinities are pleased, but when they are not honoured, all religious acts are fruitless."[2]

"Houses cursed by the women of the family, to whom homage has not been given as their due, perish entirely, as if they had been annihilated by a magic sacrifice."[3]

"In every family, where the husband is contented with his wife and the wife with her husband, happiness is assured for ever."[4]

Would one not believe according to these words of Manu, that they ought to be free and happy, these women, adoration of whom was imposed upon men by law, in the name of religion, and contempt for whom would draw down the anger of the gods?

Let us continue to read and pause further on: "A little girl, a young woman, or a woman advanced in years, must never do anything even in her own dwelling-place according to her mere pleasure."[5]

[1] Livre III, sl. 55.
[2] Livre III, sl. 56.
[3] Livre III, sl. 58.
[4] Livre III, sl. 60.
[5] Livre V, sl. 147.

"During childhood, a female must depend upon her father; during youth, upon her husband; her husband being dead, upon her sons, if she has no sons, upon the near kinsmen of her husband; in default, upon those of her father; if she has no paternal kinsmen, upon the sovereign; a woman must never govern herself as she likes!" [1]

Strange contradiction! Must man thus honour a slave, devoid of all initiative, deprived even of reason—for, to think is to will and to will is to act—brutalized by an obedience, passive, continual, even dishonourable when it made the mother bow before her child? This entire code manifests throughout a singular mixture of love and of fear, of respect and of scorn. Now, raising the woman upon a magnificent pedestal, Manu appeared to present her as the source of all good, for the adoration of man; then brutally throwing her down from the height where he had himself placed her, he saw in her the genius of evil, and cast her at the feet of a master. Might it not be her attraction, impelling him towards her, which made him dread her empire so much?

We saw in examining the religious rights of the Indian woman that the only divinity offered by Manu for adoration by the woman was her husband; the only religion imposed upon her was family affection

The same legislator who considered that for a girl perpetual celibacy was better than a badly assorted union, expected nevertheless, if such a marriage had unhappily been effected, the unchangeable respect of the wife for her unworthy husband. If, putting aside the exaggeration of the form, we sift this law to the bottom, we shall see that it is a just law protecting the domestic sanctuary. Doubtless the parties were not equally matched; for the husband had the right to repudiate his wife for lesser wrongs than those of which he could with impunity be guilty towards her; but what could correct and even rehabilitate him, if it were not the wholesome influence of the family?

The author of the Harivansa made the regeneration of the husband to be the salvation of the wife: "The husband, inconsiderate in his actions, fallen or vicious, is saved by his wife who saves herself at the same time." [2]

[1] Livre v, sl. 148

[2] *Harivansa* or *Histoire de la famille de Hari*, a work forming an appendix of the *Mahâbhârata* and translated from the original Sanskrit by M. A. Langlois. See lecture cxxxvi

Manu extenuated, besides, in several places those of his precepts which might have pressed too hardly upon the wife: "Even when a husband takes a wife, whom the gods give him, but for whom he feels no love, yet should he always protect her, if she be virtuous . . . such conduct will please the gods "[1]

Not only did he guard her against the consequences of the unjust indifference of her legal protector, but he even defended her against the latter's caprices. "Let mutual fidelity continue to death, this, in few words, is the supreme law between husband and wife."

"Let a man and woman united by marriage constantly beware, lest, at any time disunited, they violate their mutual fidelity."[2]

The legislator desired that the husband should make his yoke mild and pleasant to the wife. Sometimes forsaking this principle, he permitted the Hindu to strike his wife—an odious law which contrasted with the noble precept of another legislator: "Do not strike, even with a flower, a wife guilty of a hundred faults."[3] Knowing besides that the wife who had the consciousness of her personal dignity, was the best guardian of her honour, Manu doubted the efficacy of personal punishment In fact, was not the wife already sufficiently debased, when she was only restrained by material obstacles?[4]

At this moment, he unfolds one of those precepts applicable to every time and to every country; for they are eternally true Calling to his aid the moralizing power of work, he declared that the occupations of the mother of a family were the best chains for binding the woman to the domestic hearth. One word of Manu explained and excused to a certain degree his severity towards women The legislator became frightened on considering the ascendancy exercised by her on all around,

[1] Livre ix, sl 95

[2] Livre ix, sl 191, 102

[3] *Digest of Hindu Law*, translated by Colebrooke (Quoted by Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, comp *Lois de Manu*, livre viii, note on sloka 299)

[4] As Wilson and M Reinaud observe, the Indian princes permitted their wives to receive in public audiences and with uncovered faces, their subjects and even strangers The Musulman invasion restrained that liberty Compare Wilson's *Hindu Theatre*, Calcutta, 1827 M Reinaud's *Extrait d'un mémoire historique sur l'Inde, antérieurement au onzième siècle de l'ère chrétienne d'après les écrivains arabes et persans*, Paris, 1854, and *Relations de voyages faits par les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et dans la Chine dans le neuvième siècle de l'ère chrétienne*, Paris, 1845

an ascendancy which he judged even the wise incapable of resisting.

It was not that he did not recognize that man also impressed upon his companion the direction of his ideas: "Whatever be the qualities of the man with whom a woman is united by lawful marriage, such qualities she herself acquires; like a river united with the sea."[1] But in his partiality for the husband, it seemed to him that more good than evil resulted from that fact. How much more did he mistrust female ascendancy!

And, truly, what would become of a family abandoned to the influence of a woman without virtue, an influence, hidden and unceasing, and the more dangerous because it was exercised upon those whom she dominated without their being even aware of it? "For he," Manu says, "who preserves his wife from vice, preserves his offspring from suspicion of bastardy, his ancient usages from neglect, his family from disgrace, himself from anguish, and his duty from violation."[2]

A story from the Bhāgavata-Purāna comments in a striking manner upon the Indian ideas, so contradictory, as regards woman and her powerful influence on human life. Diti, the mother of the Daityas, had seen her two sons killed by Indra; and she meditated vengeance. She counted upon the supernatural power of her husband, Kasyapa, for putting it into execution; therefore she must captivate her husband.

She added the charms of her grace to the strict fulfilment of her duties. Her virtue, at once austere and amiable, and her tender devotion produced their effect upon the Brāhman sage.

"Thus fascinated, though a learned man, by this clever woman," said the sacred author, "Kasyapa, yielding to her empire, promised her what she asked him, there is nothing astonishing in the success of a woman. For having remarked, in the beginning, that the beings he had created were lonely, Creation's Lord formed woman, that being who steals men's reason, which is half of his own personality."[3]

The Brāhman overwhelmed with praises the wife who had rendered him adoration, the wife who had regarded him

[1] Livre ix, sl 22.
[2] Livre ix, sl 7
[3] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, Bk vi, chap xviii

as "the supreme Divinity"; and Diti, proud of this success, asked of him an immortal son, whose invulnerable hand might strike and annihilate Indra, her sons' murderer. Kasyapa saw the charmed veil rent, which had hidden from his eyes his wife's cunning He groaned over his weakness. It was too late; he had promised.

"Where is," he said, with bitter regret, "where is the fault of this woman, who had but followed her natural inclination . . . ? The lips of women expand like an autumn lotus, their voice is like ambrosia for the ears, their heart resembles the edge of a razor, what man has ever understood the conduct of women? No one, in fact, is an object of love to women, who are entirely devoted to the object of their desires, they kill or cause to be killed, for their interest, a husband, a son, or a brother"

How does the proud disdain of the legislator, how does the transient anger of the poet vanish before the wife faithful to her duty!

"Those women," said Manu, "who join with their husbands in the desire to have children, who are perfectly happy, worthy of respect and an honour to their homes, are truly goddesses of fortune; there is no difference."[1] "From the wife alone proceed children, the accomplishing of pious duties, the earnest solicitudes, the most delicious pleasures, and heaven for the ancestral shades and for the husband himself"[2]

In the Harivansa this thought is developed with still greater force, having stigmatized the frivolous woman, it adds.—

"But she, who, perfect in her deeds, regards a husband as a god, never swerves from her duties and follows the path of the virtuous woman, such a one becomes the honour and support of the world. yes, the world is preserved by these women, modest in their language, pure in their habits, firm in virtue, constant in their piety, and always wise in their discourses."[3] It was, in fact, by the woman, the mainstay of her family, that caste was perpetuated and the Brāhmanical edifice sustained

Let us transcribe here, according to the beautiful translation of M. Nève,[4] the discourse to which we lately alluded, the

[1] Livre ix, sl 26 [2] Livre ix, sl 28 [3] Lecture cxxxvi

[4] *Des portraits de femmes dans la poésie épique de l'Inde*, Fragments of moral and literary studies on the *Mahābhārata*, by Felix Nève, Bruxelles, 1858

discourse of Sacuntalā, which in the legend of the Mahābhārata is not perhaps in its right place, but in which the cause of women is warmly advocated. Never amongst any people, or in any country, has the poet bowed with more love and respect before the wife and the mother.

"The ancient singers have declared it: the man who unites himself to the woman is born again in her children; from this comes the title of mother (jāyā) for the spouse. If a son is born to a man faithful to the laws of his creed, he saves, by perpetuating his race, his ancestors previously deceased. For that he delivers the soul of his father from the infernal sojourn called *Put*, a son is called *Putra*, as Swayambhu himself has declared[1] The spouse is an object of honour in the house; it is she who brings up the children, the spouse is the breath of life to her husband, she is all devotion to her master. The spouse is the half of man; she is for him the best of friends, the spouse is the source of perfect well-being; she is the root of the family and of its perpetuity Men who have wives accomplish well the sacred ceremonies and fulfil the duties of head of the house, when they have spouses, men are filled with joy and the happiness of salvation is assured to them. Wives are as friends in the wilderness, giving consolation by their gentle discourse, they are like fathers in the serious duties of life; they become like mothers in times of misfortune Wives are a succour to the traveller forsaken in wild solitudes, whoever has a wife is sure of support; thus is why wives offer the best of refuges in life Does her husband emigrate to another world and fall alone into the abodes of darkness? A constantly devoted spouse follows him into that region If she is the first to die, the faithful spouse remains ceaselessly expecting her husband, on whom her gaze is fixed; if her husband precedes her, the virtuous wife follows him even in death.

"Also, marriage, O prince, is a much-desired state; the husband possesses in fact his wife, not only in this world, but even in that which is to come. The sages having said that the son of a man is another himself, born of himself, a man ought to respect his wife, the mother of his child, as much as his own mother When he gazes at the child of his

[1] Manu Swāyambhuva, the first man, to whom is attributed the code which Bhrigu promulgated

wife, as if he saw his own face in a mirror, he experiences the same joy as the pure man who has obtained heaven. Consumed by the troubles of the soul, afflicted by reverses, men find pure delight in their wives, as creatures suffering from heat find in the freshness of water. Although irritated by an insult, the man must never give pain to the wife who has been his delight; he must rather consider that on her depend his joy, his happiness, and the accomplishment of his duties. The wife is the constant and sacred source of life, for without her, the Rishis (divine sages), could they of themselves have given birth to a child? When a son, even if all covered with dust, runs towards his father and embraces him, what greater pleasure can there exist?"

We see, in the Brāhmanical society as in the Vedic family, all the honours are reserved for the mother of a son.

"Then only is a man perfect, when he consists of three persons united, his wife, himself, and his son; thus have learned Brāhmans announced this maxim 'The husband is even one person with his wife.'"[1]

The wife to whom nature had refused the happiness of maternity might be repudiated in the eighth year of her marriage, she who had only given birth to daughters, in the eleventh year; finally by a law as cruel as unjust, the mother whose children had been struck by death would be punished for her misfortune; her husband would have the right to send her away in the tenth year after their marriage. Pity, however, crept into the heart of Manu and made him recoil from the arbitrariness of some of these measures. The pure and good wife should not, if suffering from illness, be exiled from the domestic hearth unless she consented; and the king, legal defender of wives, should protect the barren or suffering wife. Polygamy received at that time an extension to which Krishnaism would again add something. The gynæceum became organized, the wives were classed according to the caste in which they were born, and the Dwija could not, under pain of a curse, assign the care of his person and the privilege of assisting in his religious duties, to other than the wife of the same rank as himself.

How much did the wife's part lose its ancient nobility

[1] Manu *Lois*, livre ix, sl. 45.

and importance in the rivalries and internal struggles of the gynæceum! The law said: "Thus, if one amongst all the wives of the same husband bring forth a male child, Manu has declared them all, through that son, to be mother of male issue."[1]

But was this a sufficient consolation for the latter? The interior apartments were probably more than once saddened by scenes analogous to those dramatically detailed in the Bhāgavata-Purāna.[2]

Chitrakētū, king of the Sūrasēnas, was unhappy in the midst of the enjoyments of superior rank; even his crown had no longer any attraction for him; he had no son who should one day receive it from his enfeebled hands. The Rishi Angiras, then staying at the royal residence, was struck by the expression of sadness spread over the monarch's features, and asked him the reason of his trouble. Chitrakētū confessed it and implored his aid, and the blessed one, celebrating a sacrifice, gave to Kritadyuti, the king's first wife, what remained of the offering consecrated to the gods.

"Thou shalt have an only son, sire," said he to the sovereign, "who will be to thee a cause of pain and of joy." Several months after the queen became a mother; a son was born to her. Great was her joy and that of her royal husband; great also was the shame of her rivals. "The love of the Rishi of kings," added the poet, "for this son, whom he had had so much trouble in obtaining, grew every day, like the love of the poor man for the money which he had only earned with much trouble"

His tenderness redoubled for the wife who had brought him so much happiness, and henceforth he lived entirely for her, and for their child. The forsaken inhabitants of the gynæceum, already torn by jealousy, exchanged gloomy reflections: "Woe," they said, "to the barren wife, to the guilty wife, who is esteemed neither by her husband nor by her household, and who is scorned like a woman-slave by rivals who have beautiful children!

"But what reason would such wives have to bemoan the lot of women-slaves who serve their master, if these ceased not to receive tokens of love from him? We, we are as

[1] Livre ix, sl 183
[2] Livre vi, chap xiv

miserable as the slave of a slave." Despair, envy, and hate excited them to commit an execrable deed: they administered a swiftly working poison to the son of their rival. Not a cry of agony could he give to warn those who surrounded him. His mother, seeing him lie motionless, believed him to be asleep and dared not awake him. She grew anxious, nevertheless, because of the long sleep; calling the nurse, she ordered her to bring the child to her. The pale face and motionless body of the young prince revealed the frightful truth to the woman, and she sank to the ground.

At her cries the queen ran up and fainted by her son's corpse. The king, the ministers, and the Brāhmans all rushed to the room of death. The father's grief was indescribable, but the mother could not believe her misfortune; she could not believe that death had laid its livid mark upon this adored child, who but yesterday was laughing and beaming with life. They were not the outbursts of a tragic despair which has its foundation in the imagination, but were groans wrung from her very heart. She had begun by accusing heaven, and her plaint, begun in blasphemy, ended with this harrowing appeal: "Do not abandon, dear child, thy unhappy mother, who remains without any support, look at thy father, who is consumed by grief; go not away from us with the pitiless Yama,[1] so that we may easily pass through, thanks to thee, the darkness of hell, so difficult to cross for him who has no son.

"Rise, my dear son; see, here are children of thy own age who call thee to play with them. A long time thou sleepest, and thou must be hungry. Take the breast, suck, and dissipate the sorrow of thy parents.

"Unfortunate me! I no longer see, O my son, thy face like the lotus, with its infantine smile and its joyous look. Art thou then gone without hope of return, to the other world, dragged by pitiless death? I hear no longer thy lisping words."

This mad hope in the face of the most irresistible misfortune, the denial of death in the presence of death itself, the solicitude which watches over the life, even in the next world, of one whom she had sheltered in this, followed by the bitter certainty

[1] Yama, the god of death in the Brāhmanical pantheon.

of the reality, form part of those emotions everywhere and always true; for these belong to nature.

To the mother, as we have seen, Manu confided the education of her children: "The bringing forth of children," he said, "their nurture, and the daily superintendence of domestic affairs, such are the duties of wives" [1]

The strict part played by the mother in education, assigned by the legislator to the wife, almost tempts us to pardon his apparent harshness towards her What perfection must be united in her who should train men! In all the precepts concerning family relationships, the authority was divided between the father and the mother, the child, even when grown up, should lavish upon the authors of his being tokens of equal obedience, equal respect, and equal love.

As Manu reflected upon the sufferings and abnegation of the mother, he raised her even above the father: "A mother," he said, "is more to be revered than a thousand fathers" [2] The sentiment that dictated to him this profound and touching idea, often animated the poets The Hindu, keenly feeling the pure and holy joys dwelling in conjugal love, understood with the same delicacy that other love, the most divine of all—maternal love. None better than he knew how to describe actions so august in their artless simplicity, those irresistible movements of tenderness, that ineffable enthusiasm, which devotion to her child inspires in woman.

It is the noblest type of Wife alone that does not yield before the supremacy of that of Mother.

When Krishna struck down Srigāla, the proud monarch of Karavīrapura, the wives of the royal gynæceum surrounded the corpse of their husband. The son of Srigāla accompanied them, and before the inanimate corpse of his father, the orphan's tears freely flowed. His grief increased that of Srigāla's companions: "Noble hero," they cried, "there is the weak child whom thou hast left behind! Without experience and deprived of thee, how can he walk in his father's footsteps?" [3] And they reflected sadly upon their own lot But the first of the royal spouses, the mother of the young prince, obeying a sublime inspiration, took the

[1] Livre ix, sl 27
[2] Livre ii, sl 145
[3] *Harivansa*, lecture cc

child in her arms. Dignified in her grief, she approached her husband's murderer, and holding towards him the son of him whom he had killed, she said : " Sire, he, who by the fate of war has fallen by thy sword, has left a son who here implores thy protection. This child pays homage and submits himself to thy commands ; let not all these people suffer from the crime of one man If the unhappy one whose folly we all deplore was thy relation, suffer him not to remain lying in the dust Generous warrior, let the child of thy fallen relation be defended by thee ; let him become as thy own son "

The great soul of Krishna was moved by the action and the words. He had struck in defence of the sacred rights of justice, but, punishment inflicted, clemency alone survived. " Queen," he replied, deeply moved with kindness, " my anger died with the life of this unhappy madman We recognize the laws of nature, and I remember that this child belongs to my family. Your gentle words, excellent lady, have sufficed to calm my resentment Yes, he who was Srigāla's son shall become mine He is sheltered from all danger, and I wish that for his happiness he should receive the royal baptism from me. Assemble the different orders, call the family pontiff and the councillors, that your child may be consecrated as the successor to the throne of his ancestors "

After the coronation of the young king came his father's funeral The widow of Srigāla assisted at the funeral ceremony, and though some wives had already given the example of burning themselves upon their husband's body, the queen did not precipitate herself upon the flames which were devouring the monarch's remains

Manu, however, was far from authorizing that strange custom, which even in our days, immolates the widow upon her husband's pyre [1] The legislator commanded the wife whom death had deprived of her support not to contract new ties ; he cursed her who should dare to transgress

[1] The edict forbidding the burning of widows was passed by the king of England in Council in the year 1833, and it is noteworthy that Rajah Ram Mohun Roy supported the Bill, whereas Rajah Radhakanta Deb, the leader of the orthodox Hindu community of Calcutta, opposed it.

this law and menaced her with the scorn of men and the ruin of her soul. He submitted the widow to an ascetic life, that by prayer and penitence she might rejoin him whom she had lost Whether she had children or no, this conduct would make her to be honoured upon earth and admitted into heaven. The Satīs, those widows who escaped grief by self-immolation, were rare in early antiquity.

The Mahābhārata has transmitted to us the remote memory of one of these sacrifices.

When the father of the Pāndavas died, his two wives, Kuntī and Mādrī, disputed the glory of dying upon his pyre. Mādrī, the spouse he had loved the best, carried her point,[1] and bequeathed, as she expired, her children to her rival.

But that which in primitive times had been the inspiration of isolated devotion, soon became a duty. In some pages, extracted, it is believed, from a Purāna, Krishna commanded the widow not to survive her husband, and indicated what preparations should precede the immolation. An English version of these fragments has been published in the London *Asiatic Journal*, October, 1817, as follows: "Krishna then said, 'I will now make known the supreme law respecting women. It is proper that a woman should accompany her husband in death, such a faithful wife shall with her husband attain the regions of truth; for the husband, with respect to the wife, is endued with all the qualities of the gods, and all the virtues of places of holy visitation. The husband, with regard to the wife, is as Gangā to rivers as Hari to celestials, as the supreme Brahma to the saints A certain faithful wife having seen her husband expire, after having performed ablutions, went into the place where he was, and spoke these words: "Thou wert sent to me in the character of a husband, with all the attributes of a divinity I will die with thee, and thou shalt be my husband in another life. Whether thou go to heaven or to hell, attached, as it were, to thy side, thither will I go with thee. Thou, O husband,

[1] Max Müller remarks that it was the custom amongst the Thracians, the Getes, the Greeks, that one of the wives most cherished by her husband should be sacrificed upon his tomb. The Teutonic mythology also preserved some traces of this usage. Later on, the Brâhmanical creed attributed to the first wife of the dead husband the right of being burned with him See *A history of ancient Sanskrit Literature* already quoted.

art my refuge, both here and hereafter. Let reverence be paid to the husband when living, as to a divinity. If thou art about to go to the regions of punishment, for transgressions formerly committed in this life, do not be apprehensive, for I will accompany thee, and safely conduct thee to the realms of bliss. I will even save thee from the punishment ordained for the murder of a Brāhman or any other similar crime." ' "

" 'The faithful wife, upon hearing of her husband's death, having thus devoted her life, should purify herself from all impurity, according to the words of Hari. She should put on garments, dyed red with kusumbha,[1] having a border of silk; she should adorn her person with flowers and betel-leaves, and saffron and kājala,[2] with garlands and chaplets of sweet-scented flowers, and with various other ornaments. Then the faithful wife should select four young women living under their father's care, and compliment them with presents suitable to their youth, of vermilion, garlands of flowers, bracelets, sandal-wood paste, and collyrium. She should also, with due attention, make offerings to the aged father and mother of her deceased husband, to the Brāhmans, to her children, grandchildren, and other relations.' "

We find in the Bhāgavata-Purāna the interesting description of a Satī sacrifice.[3] The king Prithu had just ended his career, in turn military and contemplative. His young and delicate wife had followed him in his retreat and desired to accompany him in death.

The funeral cortege directed its way towards a mountain covered with dark forests. The way was rough and the ascent painful. The queen's feet were torn by wayside brambles; but being entirely absorbed in her grief, and in the thought of the sacrifice she was about to accomplish, she walked without regarding the dangers of the road. The summit of the mountain was reached. The pyre was prepared. At the moment of delivering to the flames the body of her husband, and of seeing those loved remains annihilated for ever, Archis felt her courage abandon her and her eyes fill

[1] *Carthamus tinctorius*

[2] "Soot used for the eyelashes and eyelids, as a medicine." (*Dictionnaire classique sanskrit-français*, by M. Émile Burnouf, with the collaboration of M. Leupol, 1863.)

[3] Book IV, chap. XXIII.

with tears. The hope of an early reunion strengthened her; she laid the body upon the pyre. "When she had prepared everything for the funeral," continued the poet, "she bathed in running water; then having offered water to her glorious husband, she saluted the gods, the inhabitants of heaven, and having walked three times round the pyre, she entered into the fire, thinking of her husband."

This last feature is sublime by its sentiment and by its truth. It was indeed necessary to think of him whose mortal remains were being converted into ashes and whose soul was flying to the heavenly habitations, in order to gaze without trembling at this formidable passage from death to immortality. And, to encourage widows to be likewise inspired by this great example, what a magnificent recompense followed! The goddesses covered with flowers the pyre of the husband and wife, and whilst heavenly music played, they extolled the happiness and glory of the wife who had devoted herself to her husband on earth and who was now following him to heaven.

"Ah, how happy she is," sang the Immortals, "this woman who has served the first of kings with a devotion as complete as that of Srī for the chief god of sacrifice! See, there she is, that virtuous woman who, as a prize for her inconceivable courage, rises, following the son of Vena [1] far above our habitation."

Here we find the peculiar ideas of the Hindus on the contemplative absorption of man during life. "What is there too difficult," continued the goddesses, "for mortals who, during their fleeting existence in this world, abandon themselves to inaction, which is the true way of attaining Bhāgavat?

"Yes, the misery is great, to which is condemned in this world the creature, inimical to himself, who in his human condition, in itself a means of salvation, attaches himself still to exterior objects?"

The fire soon devoured the bodies of the married couple, and while their ashes were being mingled together here, their united souls were reaching their heavenly abode together.

Yes, for the wife who loved her husband it was an ineffable happiness to rejoin him in another life. But for her who

[1] Vena was the predecessor, not the father of Prithu.

had been the victim of an unhappy union, for her, who, still in childhood, could hardly comprehend the grief of widowhood, and even for her, who, attached to the memory of her husband, yet felt weak at the idea of death, what a frightful prospect! what a barbarous obligation! But if she, the faithful wife, preceded her husband to the grave, what duties were incumbent on him thus left behind?

"A twice-born man, versed in sacred ordinances," said Manu, "must burn with hallowed fire and fit implements of sacrifice, his wife dying before him, if she was of his own class, and lived by these rules [1] Having thus kindled the sacred fire, and performed funeral rites to the wife who died before him, he may again marry and again light the nuptial fire." [2]

This was rather a prompt consolation, contrasting with the eternal sorrow or the cruel immolation of the widow Let us pass on

In India, as elsewhere, man makes the law

Let us say it to the glory of the Hindus; all did not hasten to avail themselves of a privilege so liberally granted There were amongst them inconsolable widowers Let us read in the Raghu-Vansa the episode of the death of Indumatī,[3] a beautiful and gracious queen and tenderly loved wife The author of the poem, Kālidāsa, has repeated the lamentations of the husband in stanzas in which—apart from the affectation in some passages, indicative of a certain literary decadence—real grief burst forth with a heartrending expression The king, Aja, escaping with Indumatī one day from the cares of government and the din of his capital, wandered with his charming companion in the royal grove which extended its flowering slopes to the feet of proud Ayodhyā

They were happy A son was growing up beside them who was to be the great Dasaratha, father of Rāma Young, beautiful, radiant with life, they spoke their mutual love . Suddenly a garland of heavenly flowers fell from heaven, it was the crown of Nārada, the messenger of the gods It fell through the air, dropped upon the bosom of the queen, and Indumatī sank to the ground lifeless. The king fainted

[1] Precepts of purity and virtue indicated in a preceding law
[2] Livre v, sl 167, 168
[3] Works of Kālidāsa, translated by M Fauche, *Raghu-Vansa*, song viii.

Prompt succour recalled him to life and to grief. Taking in his arms his wife's inanimate body, he endeavoured in one supreme embrace, to warm, upon his heart, her whom death had already touched.

But when faced with the certainty of his misfortune, his habitual control gave way, and long-suppressed tears burnt in his eyes and choked his voice. "If flowers," he murmured, "can take away our life by simply touching the body, in what could not Fate find, if alas! he wished to strike us, a sufficiently powerful weapon?"

He endeavoured to deceive himself; wishing to believe it a feint on the queen's part, he prayed her to desist from the cruel game: "Although I might have long offended thee, never hast thou cast scorn upon me; why then, at this hour when I am innocent, dost thou not think me worthy of hearing thee speak a word to me?

"I am perfidious, no one can doubt that," he continued bitterly.

"I amused myself, thou knowest it, with pretending that I loved thee, woman of the frank smile, since thou hast flown from this world to heaven without a word of farewell to me, and for an absence from which there shall be no return. Just now, my unfortunate spirit had followed my wife; why then did my spirit return without her?"

Thinking of what she had lately been, and seeing what she was now, he exclaimed. "Shame to the frailty of mortals." But the breeze played with the locks of the deceased, making them gently wave . . If it were an awakening!

"This wind, ruffling thy clustering curly hair, interwoven with flowers and bee-shaped ornaments, makes my soul believe, charming woman, that thou art returning to life.

"Deign quickly, by thy reawakening, my well-beloved, to dissipate the trouble of my heart, as the herb of Himālaya, shining at night, dispels darkness lying thick, deep down in the caverns."

There was in India a sweet and simple belief that the asoka, the elegant tree so often sung by the poets, on being touched by the foot of a beautiful woman, burst into bloom with its clusters of flowers.

Indumatī, shortly before her death, had, with her fairy tread, brushed over the marvellous plant.

"The flowers which will bloom on this asoka, fertilized by the touch of thy foot," continued the monarch, "how can I bear to change those flowers which should have been an ornament for thy curling locks in life, into a wreath to be offered to thy spirit in death! . . . . .

. . . . . . . .

Did not the society of thy friends share in thy pleasures and thy griefs? Thy son, who is here, did he not hour by hour still more resemble Lunus? Had I not one only love? And, though everything was thus, thou hast with a cruel soul, embraced such a resolution . . .

"Wife, wise counsellor, sympathizing friend, cherished disciple in the teaching of the fine arts, say, charming woman, that death, turning away his face from compassion, has not ravished thee from me?"

On the harmonious lyre of the Attic poet, did Admetus ever mourn in more touching accents the loss of her who died for him?

They painfully loosened the pale young queen from Aja's convulsive grasp, they robed her in funeral attire; and soon a fire, scented with aloes and sandal-wood, consumed all that remained of a king's love. Aja himself wanted to rush into the flames, but care for his renown and the remembrance of his people stopped him . . .

"After a lapse of ten days," added the poet, "this wise king celebrated in the same grove, under the walls of his capital, with the greatest pomp, the funeral ceremonies in honour of his wife, of whom only her virtues remained.

"He returned without her to the town. . .

. . . . . . . .

In vain did a holy anchorite endeavour, through a disciple, to arouse Aja from his lethargic grief, and to make him see in the wife he had lost, an exiled nymph from heaven who was to be recalled thither at the sight of the heavenly flowers; in vain did he bring before him the exacting duties of royalty, and in vain did he expound to him, in words of admirable philosophy, the instability of human affairs and the hopes of a future life —

"Cast away then from thee this continual brooding on her death! To die is the common misfortune of all those who

are born. About this earth must thou think ; for the earth is the veritable spouse of kings ! "

. . . .

" Death is the natural condition of souls ; life, say the sages, is for them a state of disease . . .

" For the man of feeble mind, the death of a loved object is an arrow plunged into the heart's core ; but, for the man of firm intelligence, it is the dart drawn out of the wound, for he knows that death is the gate of life."

The king murmured : " It is true ! " and remained buried in his grief.

For eight years longer his paternal love sustained him ; during those eight years, surrounding himself with images of the beloved dead, he ardently wished for an accident or an illness, which his sense of duty prevented him from seeking ; but after he had finished his son's education and assured a protector for his people, then, depriving himself of all food, he slept his last sleep.

" Soon," said Kālidāsa, in conclusion, " abandoning his corpse upon the shore, where the Sarayū begins to mingle its flood with the waters of Gangā, his soul attained the honour of being counted amongst the Immortals ; and, reunited with his wife, more beautiful even than she was on earth, he enjoyed happiness with her in the mansions of happiness which beautified the precincts of the Nandana." [1]

[1] The Grove of Indra

# PART II

# CHAPTER I

## WOMAN DURING THE LEGENDARY TIMES

**Ancient India has no history. The creation, the first man and the first woman. The first marriages The two wives of Uttānapāda: Sunītī, good conduct, and Suruchī, graceful beauty, legend of Dhruva. The daughter of Death and her son Vēna Prithu, the civilizer of India, and his wife Archis. Idā, daughter of the seventh Manu, founder of the lunar dynasty.**

WE would fain have mingled here the history of woman with that of Ancient India; described the part which she played in it, and the influence that she exercised over it; but the leading thread is missing. Neither the pen of the scribe, nor the voice of monuments relate events which must have agitated Indian society at its commencement. The Hebrew people have regularly set forth the course of their destinies in that Book, which to-day is still for us pre-eminently the Holy Book. China has opened to us her valuable and trustworthy annals Egypt and Assyria have engraved upon stone and marble the phases of their political existence. Greece has collected the traditions of the nations she had conquered. India, alone of Oriental nations, has guarded the secrets of her past, and the researches of strangers or foreigners who have attempted to wrest it from her have only ended in vague or erroneous notions. The great epics and the Purānas contain, it is true, the germ of a history, but how many veils must be uplifted before their records can be disengaged from the mysterious mist enveloping them! Composed under Brāhmanical influence, the sacerdotal idea is dominant in them, and, in the allegorical tales, arranges events so as to suit its designs. In the Purānas, above all, what deceptive enigmas are found! When we think an historical figure is discovered, we find instead a fictitious being or one purely cosmical. How, without any other guide but a fabulous chronology, can truth be distinguished from myth? And even when living personages and historical facts, which inspired the authors of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, have at last been reached, how can the materials

for serious criticism be gathered from such exaggeration of form? Perhaps it is a task reserved for modern erudition. Let us endeavour to seize a few traits of the ancient traditions, and without vainly pretending to despoil them of their legendary aspect, let us seek for those female characters who preceded the heroines of the great epic poems.

In the beginning all was chaos and obscurity. The Supreme Being was sleeping a sleep which had never had a beginning. According to the Vedic hymn, which seemed a sublime echo of the Biblical thought: "Nothing existed then, neither that which is, neither that which is not . . . There was no death, no immortality . . Only Himself respired, drawing no breath, absorbed in himself He only existed.

"At the beginning, night enveloped night . . . Everything was confounded. The one Being reposed in the bosom of this chaos . . At the beginning Love was in him and from his Intelligence sprung the first seed . . . Who knows these things? Who can tell them? Whence come the many beings . ?

"The gods also have been produced by him But *he*, who knows how he exists? He who is the first author of creation sustains it And who but he could do it? He who from the height of heaven has his eyes upon all the world alone knows it. Who else could have this knowledge?" [1]

Manu and the Purānas followed up the development of this idea. On awaking, the Supreme Being meditated upon causing life and harmony to spring forth out of the void and confusion. Suddenly, the waters invaded the world, a germ was deposited upon the liquid expanse and became a golden egg, whence said Manu, "the Supreme Being himself was born in the form of Brahma, the great forefather of all beings." [2] The egg dividing, formed heaven and earth. Brahma created all nature which he animated with the universal spirit: he created the gods, virtues, vices, religious rites, sciences, letters, and arts. He produced the Prajāpatis, the patriarchs of India, and finally, from his own substance and from the two portions of his body, he created man and woman.

It was the dawning of the immense period of time, which composed one *Kalpa*, one of Brahma's days, namely, four

[1] *Essai sur le Véda*, by Emile M. Burnouf

[2] Livre 1, sl. 9.

billions, three hundred and twenty millions, of human years! At the end of each of these days the universe was dissolved, and Brahma slept; it was the night of God, it was Pralaya, destruction. One year of Brahma comprised three hundred and sixty Kalpas. When a hundred years of Brahma will have passed the creator and the creation will be for ever destroyed, it will be the Mahā-Pralaya, the great destruction; it will be the end of time. In each Kalpa reign fourteen Manus, fourteen chiefs of the human race. Seven have passed, seven more have to come.

The first Manu, inclining himself before the Supreme Being, offered his homage and that of Satarūpā his wife; "Thou alone art the creator, father, the nurse of every being; consent nevertheless, to indicate to us, who are thy children, the means of testifying our obedience to thee

"Adoration to thee, who art worthy of praises! Show us, amongst the actions possible for our energy, the one that we ought to do to obtain glory in the entire universe and salvation in the future world." [1]

And Brahma, smiling upon his children, answered with paternal kindness: "I am pleased with thee, my son; may happiness accompany you both, O sovereign of the earth! because thou hast told me of thyself with a sincere heart; command me!

". . . Bring into the world children who will resemble thee in their good qualities; govern the earth with justice, O my son; honour Purusha [2] with sacrifices . . ."

By the wife whom the Supreme Being had given him, Manu had two sons, Priyavrata [3] and Uttānapāda,[4] whose valour and piety the Purānas celebrate; and three girls of perfect beauty and high character.[5] The paternal power was equally divided between the first man and the first woman, whom tradition called the great queen Satarūpā. The human race of the sons of Manu united themselves with the divine race

[1] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, translated by M Eugène Burnouf, bk iii, chap. xiii

[2] "Purusha means Brahma principally as the father of the world, as the author of generations and the propagator of life" *Essai sur le Véda*, p 365

[3] Priyavrata means one who devotes himself to love for others. See M Pavie, *Études sur l'Inde ancienne et moderne*, Revue des deux mondes

[4] Uttānapāda. one who goes straight before. (M. Pavie, work above mentioned)

[5] One of them was Devahūti (See first pt, chaps i and ii)

of the Prajāpatis, sons of Brahma, and thus the first marriages were contracted.

Uttānapāda married two wives: Sunītī (good conduct) and Suruchī (graceful beauty). The king, however, paid homage, not to the virtues of the former, but to the attractions of the latter.

They had both made him a father, but Sunītī saw her son sacrificed to that of her haughty rival. Upon Uttama[1] only was the king free to shower marks of tenderness.

One day, seated on the throne, he held upon his knees his favourite child; Sunītī's son, Dhruva,[2] desirous of sharing with his brother the effusions of paternal love, held out in his turn his little hands towards the monarch. Suruchī was present; Uttānapāda repulsed the poor child, and the favourite wife, not satisfied with this refusal, added yet this insult: "Why, child, do you vainly indulge in such presumptuous hopes? You are born from a different mother, and are no child of mine, that you should aspire inconsiderately to a station fit for the excellent Uttama alone. It is true you are the son of the rājā, but I have not given you birth. This regal throne, the seat of the king of kings, is suited to my son only; why should you aspire to its occupation? why idly cherish such lofty ambition, as if you were my son? do you forget that you are but the offspring of Sunītī?"[3]

The King remained silent Thus repulsed, the child ran out of the royal hall into his mother's apartment. Bursting into sobs, he ran to her, and this time fond arms encircled him.

Sunītī smiled; she thought it was one of those troubles so frequent in childhood, troubles as acute in expression as the cause for them is slight; but soon her smile was lost in tears; her son had told her of the favourite's cruel words and of the king's culpable indifference

Within that serene and calm soul, resentment had no access. She covered with kisses and tears the child, apparently wishing to make up for his father's scorn; but she saw a sparkle of anger gleam in his eye . . .

[1] Uttama. the first among his equals, *optimus*. (M. Pavie, work above mentioned)

[2] Dhruva: one who is decided in his thoughts (M. Pavie, work above mentioned)

[3] *Vishnu Purāna*, translated by Wilson, bk. i, chap. xi.

"Wish evil to nobody, dear child," she exclaimed; "no, for man himself suffers from the evil he does to others. Suruchī has spoken the truth; unfortunate is she who has borne thee in her bosom and fed thee with her milk, she whom the master of the earth is ashamed to take as his legitimate wife or even as a servant." [1]

She thus comforted with a purer hope the child who wept for the loss of a throne. Was not a sense of duty the best road to greatness?

"The regal throne," she said, "the umbrella of royalty, horses and elephants, are his whose virtues have deserved them; remember this my son and be consoled." [2]

The poet here has transported into remote antiquity the more modern belief in metempsychosis. Sunītī bowed before the misfortune, which was perhaps punishing her, as well as her son, for faults committed in another existence, whilst heaven was rewarding Suruchī and Uttama for a previous existence of piety and virtue. If Dhruva desired an august fate, he must merit it by doing good. "Be amiable, be pious, be friendly, be assiduous in benevolence to all living creatures; for prosperity descends upon modest worth as water flows towards low ground." [3]

Of these counsels for conduct, quite evangelical, the child had only understood one. "Mother, the words that you have addressed to me for my consolation find no place in a heart that contumely has broken. I will exert myself to obtain a rank so elevated that it shall be revered by the whole world. Though I be not born of Suruchī, the beloved of the king, you shall behold my glory who am born of you. Let Uttama, my brother, her child, possess the throne given to him by my father, I wish for no other honours than such as my own actions shall acquire, such as even my father has not enjoyed" [4]

In this precocious renouncement of earthly greatness, in this ardent aspiration after spiritual joys, one sees the great form of the Brâhman arise, consoling himself for the loss of temporal power with another power still more

[1] *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, bk iv, chap. viii.
[2] *Vishnu Purâna*.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid

formidable. Was it really a child of five years old who spoke? No, it was the sacerdotal caste who used those innocent lips to glorify its mission Here one feels involuntarily a really singular anachronism; and from this factitious antiquity one goes back to the primitive time, of which we have a faithful picture left us by the Vedas, and in which the same man who fought the aborigines also cultivated the fertile country, and, without intermediary, supplicated heaven for blessings upon the success of his arms and the prosperity of his harvests.

The entire legend that suggested this reflexion, breathes the same sentiment Dhruva left his mother and his father's palace and retired into a wood. There were the Rishis assembled, the seven sages, who were the divine preceptors of mankind Before them Dhruva vehemently laid bare the situation to which he had been brought by a favourite's pride; and one of them, Nārada, exclaimed, astonished:—

"Oh, the energetic spirit of the Kshattriyas, who do not allow their pride to be abased! The one here, child as he is, ponders in his heart the hard words of a stepmother" [1]

Like a father he counselled resignation to the child, but the blood of warriors boiled within that young breast, and Dhruva addressed this proud answer to the sage:—

"That calmness, which in his compassion Bhāgavat taught to men whose hearts are agitated by pleasure or by pain, is too difficult to attain for beings of my class.

"It does not descend upon the dauntless and passionate heart of a Kshattriya, such as I am, wounded by the darts of the insulting words of a stepmother

"Teach me, O Brāhman, a good way whereby I may attain to the most elevated position in the three worlds, a position that has not been occupied by my ancestors or by others" [2]

The Rishis, struck by the irascibility and boundless pride of the prince, could not cease admiring the force of his character They indicated to him how he could raise himself above humanity: namely, by adoring Vishnu. Vishnu in remote antiquity! in times when that god only personified the three principal aspects of the sun! Ah! let us repeat, once more, how far we are from the symbolism of the Aryas!

[1] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, bk iv, chap viii
[2] Ibid

While Dhruva had withdrawn from the Rishis and was penetrating into the forest of Madhuvana, sacred to Vishnu, Nārada repaired to the palace, from which the king's son had fled.

There all was gloom. After the departure of Sunītī's child, Uttānapāda had learnt how he loved the child he had rejected; but, controlling his grief, he offered Nārada the homage due to him.

"Wherefore, O king," said Nārada, "dost thou abandon thyself to the gloomy thoughts that sadden thy countenance? Surely, neither pleasure, nor virtue, nor fortune, are wanting to thee." [1]

A heartrending cry of affliction and remorse broke from the monarch. Cursing his weakness and his favourite's influence, he answered, with tears: "My young son, O Brāhman, only five years old, so wise a child, has left the town with his mother, and it is my preference for another wife and my harshness to him which have forced him to do so.

"Will not the wolves devour a child, alone in the forest, helpless, exhausted by hunger and fatigue, lying upon the bare ground, his face looking like a withered lotus?

"Thus, see my cruelty, O Brāhman, and my weakness for a woman! I have been harsh enough to repulse my child, when, only from affection for me, he wanted to climb upon my knees!"

It was a father who spoke. Nārada did not mistake him. Expiation called for pardon, and regret for hope.

"Weep not, O king of men, over thy son, for he is protected by a god; thou art ignorant of his greatness, whose glory will fill the universe.

"After having accomplished a work most difficult, even for the guardians of the world to execute, he will soon succeed in extending thy renown." [2]

The voice of the sage penetrated the wounded heart of Uttānapāda, like healing balm. He forgot his empire and thought of his son . . Dhruva embraced with ardour the austere practices of religion. The Brāhman, who had attained the highest point of abnegation, could replace the king of

[1] *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, bk. iv, chap. viii.
[2] *Bhâgavata-Purâna*, ibid.

the firmament, and the austerities of the young prince made Indra tremble upon his throne.

Alarmed, the gods assembled together. What means could be employed to send back the child to the world? A celestial spirit assumed the form of his beloved mother, the pious Sunītī, and drew near to Dhruva with a face bathed in tears:

"My son, my son, desist from destroying thy strength by this fearful penance. I obtained thee, my son, after much anxious hope; thou canst not have the cruelty to quit me, helpless, alone, and unprotected, because of the unkindness of my rival. Thou art my only refuge; I have no hope but thee. What hast thou, a child but five years old, to do with rigorous penance? Desist from such fearful practices that yield no beneficial fruit. First, comes the season of youthful pastime, and when that is over, comes the time for study; then succeeds the period of worldly enjoyment; and lastly that of austere devotion. This is thy season of pastime, my child. Hast thou engaged in these practices to put an end to thy existence? Thy chief duty is love for me; different duties are appropriate to different times of life. Lose not thyself in bewildering error; desist from such unrighteous actions. If not, if thou wilt not desist from these austerities, I will end my life in thy presence."[1]

Vainly that dear voice recalled him to mundane joys; the child did not even hear it. Suddenly she exclaimed: "Fly, fly, my child; the hideous spirits of ill are crowding into this dreadful forest with uplifted weapons!" And the illusion vanished.

Again we will translate from the vigorous and graphic English version of the Vishnu Purāna, the account of the strange spectacle visible in the sombre depths of the forest.

"Then advanced frightful Rākshasas, wielding terrible arms, and with countenances emitting fiery flame, and nocturnal fiends thronged around the prince, uttering fearful noises, and whirling and tossing their threatening weapons. Hundreds of jackals, from whose mouths gushed flame as they devoured their prey, were howling aloud, to appal the boy, wholly engrossed in meditation. The goblins called out: 'Kill him, kill him, cut him to pieces; eat him';

[1] *Vishnu Purāna*, bk. i, chap. xii

and monsters, with the faces of lions and camels and crocodiles, roared and yelled with horrible cries to terrify the prince. But all these uncouth spectres, appalling cries, and threatening weapons, made no impression upon his senses, whose mind was completely intent on Govinda.[1] The son of the monarch of the earth, engrossed by one only idea, beheld uninterruptedly Vishnu seated in his soul, and saw no other object." The gods were beaten, but Vishnu, whom they implored, reassured them. Dhruva did not aspire to their power.

Appearing before the prince in all the radiancy of his glory, he listened kindly to the praises and the prayers addressed to him by the young ascetic. He declared the destiny that awaited him; after having governed the earth, Dhruva would become the pole star, the traveller's guide and the sailor's hope. Would this not be a striking image of the Brāman's mission?

The prince quitted the forest and retook the way to the towns, he had no longer that serene quietude that lately isolated him from the world, he had solicited honours from him who could deliver him from his earthly tabernacle. The passions of this world worked still in his heart, he could not forget the cruel scorn of his stepmother and he thought with dismay that perhaps one day he should see in his brother a rival and an enemy. .

The news of Dhruva's return spread rapidly. As to the king, "he did not believe it any more than if they had told him that the child had returned from amongst the dead."[2]

But Uttānapāda remembered the prediction of Nārada; hope replaced doubt, and joy grief.

Accompanied by his two wives, decked in golden ornaments and borne in litters, he left his capital in great pomp. Troubled, and with beating heart, he approached the border of the forest. Soon after, the young ascetic sprang out from behind the foliage that veiled the sacred solitudes from view, and was with eager haste met by the monarch.

Seizing in his arms the kneeling child, he showered upon him those caresses formerly denied to him, and while he blessed him tears betokened his repentance and his love.

[1] One of the names of Vishnu
[2] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, bk. iv, chap. ix

In that supreme embrace Dhruva felt all resentment vanish away. The King's two wives were there . . . Surely, he is going to throw himself upon the bosom of his mother . . . ? He advanced, prostrated himself at the feet of both queens, and thus united them in the same act of homage.

Suruchī, no longer haughty, but humble, no longer imperious, but tender, did not resist the emotion caused by this act of forgiveness. To a mother's heart she drew the son of her rival, and her voice, choked with tears, could scarcely murmur the words : "Mayest thou live long !"[1] The two brothers embraced with effusion, and the real mother, distracted with joy, forgot her anguish in her child's kisses. The people who pressed around her in their sympathy attributed the son's glory to the virtues of his mother, and the women of the city honoured the prince with offerings, and their songs of joy celebrated the return of the lost child

Long years had passed by Uttānapāda had retired to a hermitage, and had established Dhruva as lord of the earth It was not, as M. Pavie[2] remarked in his commentary upon this legend, it was not royalty that this title expressed, but the superhuman power of the Brāhman

Uttama governed the state. Led away by his passion for the chase, he perished in one of his venturesome hunts, and while his mother sought for him in the woods the forest caught fire, and Suruchī rejoined her son

At this news, Dhruva, who believed himself dead to worldly feelings, was in despair and revolted against himself It was a Yaksha, one of those gnomes, guardians of the Hindu Plutus, Kuvera's riches, that had killed his brother and had caused the death of his stepmother , demons of the same order should pay with their lives for the crime of one of their order. The shedding of blood intoxicated Dhruva . a feverish excitement took possession of him and the suppressed passions of his nature reacted violently against the suppression . . . It was no longer the new Brāhman, but the old Kshattriya . Would the virtues acquired by him be all lost in a moment of forgetfulness ? Manu, the great ancestor of the human race, appeared to his descendant. He pointed out to him

[1] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, ibid

[2] *Études sur l'Inde ancienne et moderne* (Revue des deux Mondes.)

the injustice and cruelty of his meditated vengeance. Why should the crime of one individual bring a sentence of death upon the whole race of the guilty one? Why this rebellion against the decrees of Fate? Let him, who when a child, had sufficient courage to forsake his mother and go in search of the Supreme Good, now master the anger that agitated him; let him contemplate in himself the eternal, immutable, impassive God, and the shadowy spectres of earthly passions would vanish before the radiant image

Dhruva bowed before him with respect and threw away his weapons. A long time after came the much-desired hour of deliverance. A divine chariot took away the Brāhman, and the earth soon disappeared from his view. but one bitter regret poisoned that supreme moment, for Sunītī had not finished her time of probation: "In going thus," said Dhruva, "to an abode which is so hard to attain, I am abandoning an unfortunate one!"[1] The gods understood him and showed him in the far distance his mother borne in a chariot before them Transformed into a constellation, she will no longer be separated from the glorious son known by the Hindus as the pole star

During the majestic Eastern nights they look for their king and his mother in the dark blue sky studded with flaming worlds, and salute him with veneration

This legend, Wilson has remarked, is closely connected with, the metamorphosis of Callisto and Arcas, and the Indian and the Latin poets must have each been inspired by some remote and common memory

A descendant of Dhruva, Anga, a worthy inheritor of the piety and purity of his ancestor, allowed himself to be drawn into a fatal alliance, he married the daughter of Death, a symbolical designation, applied probably to the very real person of a princess, a stranger to the aristocratic white race who had conquered India

Through her, vice and impurity crept into the posterity of Manu and the Prajāpatis, through her, misfortune became the guest of the royal house.

A really strange coincidence! Here again, as in the Bible, the children of God were lost through their alliance with an accursed race!

[1] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, bk i chap xii

Of this union was born a son Vena, who imbibed with his mother's milk the odious propensities of the children of Death. Frightened at his sanguinary instincts, his father deserted the throne, and went far off into the vast forests to seek for repose and oblivion The state could not remain without a master. The Brāhmans sent for the queen Sunīthā and crowned her son in her presence. As king, Vena was what he had promised to be when a prince, and the tyrannical acts of his youth corresponded to the cruel sports of his infancy

Literally applying to himself the definition given by Manu, of the supreme power of kings uniting the attributes of all the divinities, he believed himself god and forbade all worship but his own. The hermits, whose fresh green groves had been disturbed by the violent incursions of royal hunts, by the cries of terror and the sighs of the people, had until then kept silence; but now that their religion and their authority were threatened, they took counsel together and said: "Vena, because he is born of Sunīthā, is by nature vicious, and for that reason, though charged to protect the people, he has no other thought but to destroy them "[1]

That was in fact an occupation befitting a grandson of Death The hermits left their retreats, came to the monarch, and endeavoured to recall him to his duty; but irony and insults met their attempt It was too much, the first-born of Brahma rose, and through their prayers was the madman struck down

Sunīthā did not forsake the son whom she had precipitated into the abyss; by magical means she preserved his corpse from corruption So powerful is the voice of maternal love, extending its empire even over the most savage creatures!

The Brāhmans chose Vena's successor in a collateral line, and to express this action the Purānas made use of a very picturesque allegory, the Brāhmans shook the arms of the dead king and from these limbs came out two beautiful children, a girl and a boy At this sight, the Brāhmans shouted for joy "He," they cried with happiness, "he is a portion of the substance of the blessed Vishnu, who was made to

[1] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, bk. iv, chap xiv

purify the world; she is a creation of Lakshmî, the faithful companion of Purusha.[1]

"Of these two children, the male will become the first king; he will be the mahārājā, name Prithu, whose glory and renown will be widely spread.

"The girl will be his royal spouse; gifted with a perfect figure and with beautiful teeth, created in order to set off ornaments and heighten virtue itself, she will be, under the name of Archis, inviolably attached to Prithu."[2]

They consecrated the prince, and his wife, brilliantly attired, stood beside him. Nature herself laid her tribute at the feet of the new monarch, who would be immortalized by all the virtues of men and of kings. "He shall treat," sang the bards, "the wife of another with the respect of a son for a mother, his own wife as the half of himself.[3]

Archis heartily associated herself with the pious and pure civilizer of India When he retired from the world she followed him into his retreat. We have seen elsewhere how she understood conjugal devotion and what was her glorious end upon her husband's pyre.

The seventh Manu, Manu Vaivasvata, the son of the Sun, ancestor of the human race, had a daughter, Idā, celebrated for the fervour of her faith and for her force of character. The Veda mentions this princess; but the name of Idā denoting also the hymn, how can the woman be distinguished from the goddess?

We will not pause now upon this allegorical personage, about whom nothing positive is yet known, and of whom the strange legend in the Purānas has therefore remained impenetrable

Idā and her brother, Ikshvāku, were the founders of the two principal royal families of India. Whilst the solar dynasty recognized Ikshvāku as its founder, the lunar dynasty traced back its origin to Idā, whom Budha, son of the Moon, married

The dynasty of the children of the Sun and of the Moon were both made illustrious by the incarnations of Vishnu

[1] Purusha is one of the names of Brahma, but the Vaishnavas often apply it to their favourite god

[2] *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, bk iv, chap xiv.

[3] Ibid., chap. xvi

and by heroes of indomitable valour Rāma, king of the first, the Pāndavas, Krishna, princes of the second, drowned in the ocean of their glory their predecessors as well as their successors.

Through them we enter into that dazzling period of which the marvellous grandeur is sung by the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata.

# CHAPTER II

## WOMAN IN THE HEROIC AGE

### I. *The Rāmāyana* [1]

The wives of king Dasaratha Kausalyā, Kaikeyī, Sumitrā. Sītā, wife of Rāma The humpback, Mantharā. The great hermitess, Anasuyā The Rākshasī, Surpanakhā The anchorite, Sabarī A princess of the yellow race, Tārā. The hermitess, Svayamprabhā The women of Lankā (ancient Ceylon) and the court of Rāvana The fair Mandōdarī, first wife of the black sovereign of the Rākshasas The guardian negresses of Sītā, Trijatā, Saramā The queen mother, Nikashā. Parallel between the heroines of the Rāmāyana and those of the Iliad.

IN the Rāmāyana, Vālmīki, the Indian Homer, is celebrating one of those half-real, half-legendary events which colour the frontispiece of every people's history. He is inspired by one of the great traditions of conquest, and metamorphosed this outline into a picture of simple and vast conception, of powerful dramatic interest and of incomparable richness of tone, from which stand out in admirable design, those true, animated, ineffaceable types, which only genius can create after Him Who has given forth the divine model.

Woman plays an important part in this work. So clearly does she appear as causing the deeds in this celebrated story, that in suppressing the feminine element, the spirit of the action would be destroyed. With what religious elevation, with what brilliant rhythm does the poem open! From the grave, earnest, solemn tone of the invocation one feels that superhuman events will be revealed, and that the gods themselves, descended upon earth, will be the sublime actors. Beginning with the sacred word "Aum", whose three letters symbolize the triad,[2] the invocation hails Nārāyana, the

[1] M Fauche has dowered our language with this epic poem, with which M Gorresio has, on his side, enriched the harmonious idiom of his country We owe to M Fauche, not only the translation of the Rāmāyana but also that of Kālidāsa's works and of other Sanskrit authors And when one thinks that the learned Indianist is preparing, at this moment, the translation of the *two hundred thousand verses* of the *Mahābhārata*, a task not attempted hitherto in any other country, one is glad to admire a life so nobly employed

[2] A, Vishnu; U, Siva; M, Brahma.

Supreme Being floating upon the waters, of whom Vishnu is a manifestation and Râma an incarnation It hails Saraswatī, the holy word ; then like a trumpet celebrating the hymn of victory, it says what Rāma, the son of the happy Kausalyā, did here below, and praises the divine poet who is about to relate it to mankind —

"Om ! (Aum) Adoration to Rāma !

"Above all, adoration to Nārāyana, made man and even the most virtuous of men ! Adoration at the same time to Sarasvatī, the eloquent goddess !

"Next, let this beautiful song of victory unroll itself in triumphant march !

"Triumph to Rāma, the Dasarathide, Rāma, with the eyes of the white lotus, Rāma, who gave unceasingly some fresh joy to Kausalyā, his mother, he, whose arm overthrew a monster with ten heads, and who shines like a tilaka [1] upon the foreheads of the family sprung from Raghu !

"Homage once more to this prince of anchorites, to this ascetic well-beloved of Srī, to this poet Vālmīki, in whom is all knowledge." [2]

The introduction carries us to Vālmīki's hermitage The anchorite is talking with Nārada, one of the celestial sages, and who is, besides, the messenger of the gods, the Indian Mercury Vālmīki traces an ideal of human nature, which, however, he believes chimerical ; but Nārada assures him that the ideal can apply, trait by trait, to a living personage, to the king Rāma, whose history he then tells him After the departure of the divine messenger, the anchorite goes towards the wood surrounding his hermitage There he discovers a *tirtha* [3] whose fresh transparent waters invite him to perform his ablutions He plunges in and prays His eyes, directed at first towards heaven, now bent themselves again upon the earth, and they wandered over the trees, with their tufted foliage reflected in the lake

A couple of herons were running along the banks of the pond,

[1] Ornament upon the centre of the forehead

[2] *Rāmāyana*, a Sanskrit poem by Vālmīki, put into French by Hippolyte Fauche, nine vols in twelve, Paris, 1854-8 See Ādikānda, introduction See also Professor Ralph T H Griffith's (some time Principal of the Benares College) *Rāmāyana*, pub Trubner & Co, 1870

[3] *Tīrtha*, holy pond

and the melancholy birds were enjoying one of their rare moments of happiness. Suddenly their song is interrupted, a hunter's arrow hits the male bird, which falls down near Vālmīki. The widowed bird utters plaintive cries, her wings hover over the dead body, and her restless, trembling movements testify her anguish.

At the sight of the heron struggling in its death agony and of its desolate companion, the ascetic's eyes become wet with tears :—

"Oh, hunter," he sings, "mayest thou never attain to glory during the eternal revolution of years, since thou hast not feared to strike the heron at the time when it was intoxicated with love !"

He pauses, astonished . What has he said ? What unknown rhythm has made his words to scan ? The divine harmony has come down from heaven ; Vālmīki has mourned the death of the bird in new, melodious and measured accents ; the verse of India, the *Sloka*, is revealed to mortals. Henceforth will be born great heroic actions, sublime and tender thoughts for man now possesses a worthy instrument for their interpretation

Musing, Vālmīki returns to the hermitage. Brahma appears asking for hospitality, and the anchorite receives him with a feeling of happiness ; he retains, all the same, a melancholy frame of mind, and the slokas just pronounced rise again to his lips Brahma smiles He enjoins the sage to tell mortals in that measured cadence, inspired by Sarasvatī, of Rāma's valour and of Sītā's devotion, his pure and beautiful consort.

Vālmīki composes the poem , but who will make it known to the world ? The sons of Rāma, born of the gentle exiled Sītā in the forest, and confided to the anchorite, these shall be the melodious rhapsodists Truly a touching idea, that the children, for whom the monarch wept, should relate to his court the exploits of their father and the sufferings of their mother

Let us enter with them into that vast scene, where those events happened, which are celebrated in the Rāmāyana

We find ourselves in Ayodhyā, the abode of the princes of the solar dynasty We are in the full golden age, and in reading the curious descriptions of the royal city we gain

a lofty idea of the civilization of India in a century anterior to that of Solomon.

The moral and intellectual culture of the inhabitants of Ayodhyā correspond to their material welfare.

"The husbands made the wives their delight, and these were devoted to their husbands. to the observance of healthy practices, men, and women likewise, added firmness.

. . .

"Beauty, tact, mildness, chastity, gracious qualities, such was the character of the women in Ayodhyā, elegance reigned in their ornaments, in their costume." [1]

But what mattered such felicity to the monarch? He had no sons. Endeavouring to gain the favour of heaven for his prayers, he directs an asvamedha [2] to be celebrated, and during the holy ceremony the Brāhman Rishyasringa implores the gods not to allow the dynasty of Raghu to become extinct.

During the performance of the imposing ceremony upon earth the Immortals surrounding Brahma were taking counsel.

There was a Rākshasa, by name Rāvana, the king of Lankā, to whom the Creator had lately accorded protection from the anger of the gods. The entire universe was suffering from his cruelty How can the favour be nullified that Brahma had imprudently granted him? How can the ea..h be saved and heaven preserved?

"Good!" replied Brahma "I have now discovered a way for killing this miscreant" He had said that neither the Rishis, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Rākshasas, neither even the Nāgas [3] could put him to death. "Be it so," did I answer him. "But, out of scorn for the human race, men had not been included in his demand for protection. It is then by the hand of man that this evil-doer must be slain." [4] This man will be a god incarnate, for Vishnu will enter the three wives of Dasaratha, and Kausalyā "of the charming

[1] *Ādikānda*, translation by M Parisot, chap vi

[2] The horse sacrifice, the most august of royal sacrifices

[3] Nāgas or dragons "Demi-gods with a human face and a serpent's tail and the spread hood of the cobra Their king is Vāsuki, they inhabit the infernal regions" (Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, *Lois de Manu*.)

[4] *Ādikānda*, chap xiv.

eyes", the first of the royal spouses, becomes the mother of Rāma, who was mostly formed of the divine substance. "In the rays of this son of dazzling splendour, Kausalyā shone as much as the monarch of the gods, whose hands are armed with thunder, causes his mother Aditi to shine.[1]

"The brilliant Kaikeyī," brought Bharata into the world and the modest Sumitrā gave birth to Lakshmana, Rāma's future companion, and to Satrughna whom a similar devotion would bind to Bharata[2] At the same time those were born who were to assist Rāma in his struggle against the Rākshasas, and whom modern erudition has supposed to be the Australian Negroes (Papuans) of Lankā, the ancient Ceylon. Under the name of Vānaras or monkeys, given to the future allies of Rāma, it is thought that the Malays of the yellow race can be recognized They lived in woods and, in their habits, are comparable to the quadrumana to which tradition has assimilated them[3] Hardly had Dasaratha begun to see the heroic bent of his race developing in his son, than Visvāmitra, the Kshattriya, who, by his mortifications had attained the splendour of a Brāhman, claims the assistance of the young prince The Rākshasas are disturbing the sacrifices, but during a holy ceremony he cannot give way to his anger against them Let the youthful prince go and watch with lifted bow near the altar, to protect the anchorite who has no other weapon but prayer

Rāma's mission was now commencing. The royal mothers bless him who was going to defend the rights of the oppressed, and Lakshmana accompanied him It was at the end of this expedition that the young conqueror of the Rākshasas obtained, through the feat of breaking Siva's bow, the hand of Sītā, the virgin, not born of a woman but from a furrow of the earth, opened for sacrifice

We have seen elsewhere[4] how the marriages of Dasaratha's

[1] Ibid, chap xix

[2] Lakshmana and Satrughna were born before Bharata, but their mother being the daughter of a Vaiysa, Bharata was considered as their elder brother. (Cf Monier Williams, *Indian epic poetry*)

[3] See on this subject, *Poésie héroiqus des Indiens*, by M Eichhoff Paris, 1860 This work contains ideas, as vast as they are fertile, set forth in a masterly manner, and in style of perfect vigour and colour

[4] See first part, chap ii

four sons were celebrated with the daughters and nieces of king Janaka.

When the newly married couples arrive at the court of Ayodhyā, their stepmothers receive them with tender effusion, and, conducted by them before the domestic altars, they offer their homage to the gurus [1] whom they were to honour.

The poet traces a charming picture of the happiness of the young couples But Sītā is the one whom he sketches in the most pleasing outlines and paints with the most delicate shades of colouring Rāma and Sītā, loving each other with a pure affection, each improving and perfecting the other, mingling their lives into one: this is what Vālmīki takes pleasure in representing. Ah! is it not of one such union, that an ideal model would be presented by a subline religion, fifteen centuries later and under other skies?

The second volume, the Ayodhyākānda, now introduces us into the full swing of action

The virtue, heroism, and universal kindness of Rāma win for him the love of his father's subjects; his firmness and skill in state affairs inspire Dasaratha with the desire for his coronation early in life. The monarch is overwhelmed with the weight of years, and the repose of death will seem sweet to him after he had secured the future of his kingdom His subjects, guessing his thought, supplicate him to associate with him in power the prince, who was bestowing such active solicitude upon them, their wives and their children.

Dasaratha, greatly rejoiced, orders the ceremony of consecration. It is the favourable moment, for the gentle spring is covering the green country with flowers The old monarch commands the presence of the heir to his crown "Rāma, thou art my beloved child, most eminent by thy virtues, and born, a son equal to me, of a spouse, my equal, and the first of my wives" [2]

He announces the brilliant destiny awaiting him, and while Rāma listens with respect to his venerable father's counsels, messengers hasten to carry the great news to Kausalyā; the happy mother thanks them by loading them with precious gifts.

[1] Spiritual preceptors.

[2] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. ii.

But the king reflects; dark forebodings terrify him; he believes his death near at hand, and desires that Rāma's consecration should take place even on the morrow. The absence of Kaikeyī's son is another motive for desiring the prompt realization of his wish. "Bharata is just and good, but," added the prudent monarch, "I know to what degree the human mind is changeable . . ."[1] Solemn thoughts preoccupy Rāma; a new life opens before him. Imbued with the importance of the duties imposed by supreme power on him, and desirous of making himself worthy of them, he retires to his apartments to meditate upon them at leisure and to arrange in his mind the confused ideas caused by the emotion attendant upon such a change, as sudden as it was unforeseen He cannot, however, resist the voice of his heart, which draws him to the royal gynæceum where his mother lives. Kausalyā, robed in linen garments, is praying. Near her are the overjoyed Sītā and Lakshmana, who shares in his sister-in-law's pleasure

Rāma advances respectfully and bows —

"Beloved mother, my father has chosen me to govern his people, they will consecrate me to-morrow; such is my father's order Sītā must pass the night in fasting with me, as the king has prescribed, with the priests celebrant and our spiritual masters Deign to bestow upon me and upon the Videhan[2] my beautiful spouse, these happy words of such great efficacy for my coronation, of which the day that this precedes will see the august ceremony."

Kausalyā's happiness shows itself in tears and in the warm effusion of her maternal vows —

"My beloved Rāma, live to a great age! Perish the enemy from before thee! May thy happiness rejoice unceasingly my family and that of Sumitrā!"

She does not mention Kaikeyī, and that silence is a presentiment of secret discord After saluting Kausalyā and Sumitrā, Rāma brings back his young wife to his palace.

The subjects of Dasaratha are intoxicated with joy. The royal street, where banners are waving, is obstructed by a gay, joyous, moving crowd. A stream of visitors pour from the

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap iii

[2] Sītā, daughter of Janaka, king of Videha, of which Mithilā was the capital, is often designated by the names of *Janakide*, *Videhan* *Mithilian*

country into the town The air is filled with the melodious tones of voices and instruments. A dull roar accompanies this harmony; it is the people's voice thanking Heaven for giving them a father.

A follower and distant relative of Kaikeyī, the humpback Mantharā, standing upon the platform of the palace, is astonished at the tumult Wherefore these transports in the quiet people of Ayodhyā? Wherefore this pomp? Wherefore Kausalyā's generosity in showering largesses around her? Mantharā inquires, and learns the great news; a coronation is being prepared, but it is not for Bharata

Furious, she rushes to the chamber where reposes Kaikeyī, who is presented to us, at this first sight, in a gracious and sympathetic light.

Mantharā, whose deformed body serves but to cover a soul still more repulsive, Mantharā exclaims with rage —

"Blinded woman, rise from thy bed! What! thou art sleeping! A frightful danger is impending over thee! Unhappy one, dost thou not see that thou art being dragged into an abyss?

"Vainly thou burnest with the pride that thy happiness inspires in thee: that happiness is passing like the current of the stream that falls from the mountain!"[1]

Kaikeyī is astonished at Mantharā's anger What can be the reason? Then, with the most perfidious insinuations, Mantharā, compassionating Kaikeyī's misfortunes, points out to her Dasaratha's faithlessness, Rāma crowned, Bharata sacrificed, her rival finally triumphant

"In thy presence thy husband is prodigal with his fair words that bring thee nothing, but he reserves his gifts of real value for Kausalyā, who receives them this day"

To this woman, exciting her to vengeance, the queen's answer is generous Unfastening from her ornaments a splendid jewel, she offers it to her relative as a reward for the happy news which she has announced "There is in my heart," she says, 'even no difference between Bharata and Rāma, therefore, I shall see with happiness the king's bestowal of the royal unction upon Rāma.

"No, nothing that I love the most can cause me greater

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. v.

joy than that of knowing that this is the day on which my royal husband allows to ascend the throne, as heir to his crown, this well-beloved son, born of his flesh, this Rāma, noble hero, this incomparable treasury of virtues."

Mantharā rejects the gem scornfully, and continuing her infamous part, she describes the brilliant Kaikeyī as submitting like a slave to a happy rival But the heart of Kaikeyī is slow to open to feelings of hatred, and the young wife, looking fixedly at her attendant, takes a malicious pleasure in praising the king's choice and in speaking kindly about the merits of one whom she cherishes like a mother.

"He is full of justice," she says, "he loves to live in the midst of venerable men, his soul is grateful; his word is always the word of truth; he is pure; Rāma is the eldest son of the king, he therefore deserves the inheritance of the throne.

"He will defend like a father all his brothers during a long reign; he will lay on himself loving schemes for us, his mother and stepmothers.

"Amongst all, and even in preference to Kausalyā, it is me principally that he honours with his homage . .[1]

"Besides, will not the crown one day revert by right of succession to the son of Kaikeyī? Why art thou thus desolate, Mantharā, at the sunrise which will be my joy and which ushers in a happy day?"

These words of the queen provoke an irrefutable argument from Mantharā, who eagerly seizes the weapon with which her mistress had furnished her Does not Kaikeyī know that Bharata will be for ever excluded from the throne, and that the crown will pass from the head of Rāma, when old and enfeebled, to that of a direct heir? Might not Bharata be sacrificed to the timid jealousy of Kausalyā's son? Finally, she tears down the veil which screens the mysteries of the gynæceum, and the interior which seemed so charming is now seen to be darkened by secret dissensions.—

"Intoxicated by thy beauty, thou hast always in thy pride scorned the mother of Rāma, co-wife of the same husband; will she not now let the weight of her hatred fall upon thee?"[1] The queen is overwhelmed; she trembles for her son, and

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. vii

shudders at her rival's elevation . . . but how can this misfortune be averted?

"If thou desirest," said Mantharā to her, "I can soon have this Rāma exiled to a wood and have the royal unction given to Bharata."[1]

Mantharā has succeeded. The queen rises from her couch where she had been listlessly lying, and excited and curious to know further, questions her: "Tell me, O woman of superior intelligence, Mantharā, tell me by what means one could put Bharata upon the throne and exile Rāma to a forest?"

Mantharā reminds her that one day Dasaratha was wounded at the close of a battle, and that his wounds were dressed by Kaikeyī's beautiful hands; that, cured by her, he promised to grant her two favours that she should herself choose, and that the queen had postponed asking for their fulfilment to some future day. What better opportunity than now for claiming the king's promises? Mantharā dictates to the young wife the line of conduct to be followed with regard to the king, the tears to be shed, the anger to be displayed, the seductions to be used, in order to touch, frighten, charm her old husband. The exile of Rāma for fourteen years, the immediate coronation of Bharata, would be the result of such a scene.

But, as if the poet felt that he had given too much feeling to Kaikeyī to leave her no natural room for remorse, he shows her as fated to fail through the malediction of a Brāhman whom, when a child, she had insulted.

"Incited by her follower, her mistress saw what was wrong under the colours of what seemed to be right, and her soul troubled by the influences of a malediction, felt not that the action was culpable."

Mad with joy, she folded in her arms her perfidious counsellor, praised her acuteness, thanked her for her devotion, and even flattered her deformity.

"Humpbacks," she said, "are ill-built, deformed, have unsightly faces, but thou, my girl, thou art agreeable to the sight, as the lotus which bends under a breath of wind. It is there, in this charming hump, resembling on thy back the crest of a mountain, it is there that dwell thy excellent

[1] Ibid., chap. viii.

counsels, rivalling the very science of the Kshattriya, and thy own knowledge of the magical art. Around this, I mean to place, humpback of the pretty figure, a wreath executed in gold, if Bharata is crowned and Rāma himself relegated to a forest." She promises her valuable presents and princely honours; and, in attire, all that a woman's taste, including even a humpback's, can consider most attractive.

Mantharā, without appearing touched by the gratitude of her royal relative, answers her drily, to excite her still more: "It is superfluous to throw a bridge across a stream when its channel is dry; rise then, illustrious lady, assure thy fortune and put trouble in the heart of the monarch." Kaikeyī throws aside her ornaments, retires to the *chamber of anger*[1] and lies upon the ground. Her death, or Rāma's exile, this is what she expects from the future.

Meanwhile, the king, having prepared everything for Rāma's coronation, goes to the gynæceum, happy to bring to Kaikeyī what he believes will give her sweet joy.

He finds her gloomy, dejected, lying in the dust. Frightened, he runs to her and endeavours to soothe her sobs. Who had offended her? What does she wish for? One word and all the diamonds in the universe shall be hers. One word and the chains of the guilty or the head of the innocent shall fall at her feet, so much does the madness of passion trouble the pure and just soul of the monarch. One word and the ruler of the world will sacrifice to her his power, his riches, even his life

He raises her up, but she will not express her wish before its realization is assured . . An indefinable joy takes possession of her soul, the king is engaged by a formidable oath to accede to her desires

"May the gods," she exclaims, "united under their chief, Indra, hear the solemn oath from thy mouth, that thou wilt give me the asked-for favour May the sun and moon; may also the other planets, the ether, the day and the night, the regions of heaven, the world, and the earth; may the Gandharvas, and the Rākshasas, the demons of night, who abhor the light of day, and the domestic gods, who are pleased to inhabit

[1] The *chamber of anger* is still maintained in our day in Indian houses for wives who are displeased with their husbands Might this not be an analogy to our ancient *boudoirs*?

our houses; may all animated beings, of whatever species and whatever nature, hear the word spoken by thy lips.

"This great king who places his trust in truth, to whom duty is a well-known science, whose actions are fully accompanied by reflection, promises to place the objects of a favour in my hands: gods, I take you then as witnesses." [1]

She reminds Dasaratha of the care lavished upon him when, wounded and dying, she alone had dressed his wounds; she reminds him of the two favours he had promised her in that hour of gratitude and weakness; the moment for granting them had arrived, they were the coronation of Bharata and the exile of Rāma

Dasaratha fainted, struck to the heart. When he came to himself a heart-rending scene ensued; now, he eyed the queen with withering scorn now, soiling his white hair in the dust, he rolled at the feet of this woman, whose hands, according to the poet's strong expression, "tightened on his heart with a crushing grasp" "Mercy, O my queen, mercy," he murmured, with almost a death rattle, in hopeless despair; and after having implored her to retract, he bitterly reproached himself for the weakness that made him a slave to an oath sworn to a miserable woman, and again he fainted

Meanwhile, Kaikeyī, cold and haughty, asked him with irony in her tones, what had become of a king's word, when she saw him lying, as it were, dead before her, she threatened to kill herself Dasaratha drove her out, cursed her, cursed even the innocent Bharata, then, after that painful night had passed away and the dawn had risen which ought to have shone on such a brilliant day, the broken-down king sent, at the prayer of Kaikeyī, for the son about to be sacrificed to her As to the queen, she cruelly pressed Sumantrā, the messenger sent by Dasaratha to Rāma, to hasten the prince's arrival

On entering Rāma's palace, he found the young hero seated upon a golden palanquin covered with the skin of a spotted deer. Sītā was near him, holding the fly-flap in her delicate hands, and waiting upon her husband. The king's order was transmitted to the prince, who thought that he read in it some agreeable surprise Doubtless Kaikeyī had begged

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. ix.

of Dasaratha the favour of herself placing the crown upon the forehead of him whom she loved as her own son. He communicated this thought to Sītā, adding :—

"I go then without delay ; I haste to see this lord of the earth sitting in his secret chamber alone with Kaikeyī and free from all care." [1]

And Sītā replied, with a like mind : "Go, my noble husband," she said, "to see thy father and, with him, thy mother."

Rāma mounts his rapid chariot. Smiling and bowing gracefully, he passes along the throngs of people from whom arise continuous murmurs of applause. The women even, leaning against the trellises of their windows, wish prosperity to the handsome prince —

"May the queen Kausalyā rejoice," they say, "to see in thee, her son and may Sītā ascend with thee, noble child of Raghu, to the summit of the highest fortune." [2]

Rāma soon arrived at the royal residence ; and was ushered with Lakshmana into the presence of Dasaratha and Kaikeyī ; the two princes touched with their foreheads the feet of their father and stepmother.

The king began . "Rāma . . ." His voice, strangled by emotion, could not articulate another word, and his sobs finished the interrupted sentence. Never before had Rāma seen his father plunged into such grief. Ill at ease, he anxiously interrogated Kaikeyī. Had he been guilty of some involuntary fault against the author of his days, who was to him as God upon the earth ? Or else had some misfortune happened to the royal spouses or to his brothers ? Or else had Kaikeyī by some capricious word saddened the heart of the monarch ? What can Rāma do ? Surrender his life ? He will joyfully make the sacrifice

"Yes, I will do it even this hour, if my father, who is justice personified, commands me, or thyself ; there is nothing that I would not do at thy word Ought I not, O queen, since thou art my mother, to honour thee equally with my father ? Tell me what there is for me to do that my father desires !" [3]

The imperious and inexorable Kaikeyī dictates to him

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. xiii
[2] Ibid., chap. xiv.
[3] Ibid , chap. xv.

the cruel order that the father's lips could not pronounce: "The honour of Dasaratha is in his son's hands. Râma must uphold the royal word; with his hair turned up after the manner of the anchorites, his body habited in the bark-dress and the antelope's skin, let him gain the forests and abandon to Bharata the throne on which he was to have sat that day"

Râma, devouring his grief, did not hesitate for a moment. Calmly and smilingly he acquiesced in his stepmother's desire; only, he asked her one single question. Did the severe order dictated to him by her emanate from Dasaratha or from herself? Whatever Kaikeyî's answer may be, he will yield the sceptre to Bharata; but how much sweeter would be the sacrifice if consecrated by his father's approbation! Without delay he orders messengers to go with all haste to the country of Kaikeyî, where the maternal grandfather of Bharata governs, and to bring back the future sovereign of Ayodhyâ

"I, who speak, I shall take but an instant, and then I will go to dwell in the woods, by my father's order . or . . . by thine, Kaikeyî; but my soul is happy"

The impudent Kaikeyî, irritated at not seeing him already gone, commands that he should immediately acquit himself of the promise made to her. Dasaratha hears that injunction, and the feeble old man loses all consciousness With gentle gravity Râma reproaches Kaikeyî for having doubted his words, and for having inflicted such cruel torture upon the unhappy old man lying at their feet Why did she not spare Dasaratha that anguish, and why did she not directly address herself to the loyalty of him whom she desired to ruin? Before leaving her he speaks to her of her maternal duties towards Bharata, and solemnly pledges her to direct in the right way one about to govern a people; then respectfully saluting both her and his father, who neither sees nor hears him, he goes out with serene bearing towards the gynæceum

Lakshmana follows him. Under the impassive appearance of the hero he guesses there is a restrained grief; the eyes of Sumitrâ's son are wet with tears, and indignation throbs in his heart. The two young men enter the gynæceum In the first court were the guards, who join their hands as Râma passes; in the second were aged Brâhmans, depositaries of all the sciences, occupying the foremost rank in the king's

esteem and serving Kausalyā in exchange for the food she gives them; and then the sons of Dasaratha enter the palace of the most august of queens.

Kausalyā is yet ignorant of everything. Clad in white she meditates before the altar, in the very sanctuary of the Immortals. She prays for her eldest son, on whose head she thanks the gods for placing the crown. Receiving the young prince with tender effusion of love, she repeats to him her ardent prayers and her joyful hopes. Rāma's heart chokes with anguish.

"Mother," exclaims the exiled one, "thou knowest then not the great misfortune that is fallen upon me, to thy bitter grief, to my wife's, and to Lakshmana's?" [1]

He reveals the dreadful truth to her, and adds with sadness: "For fourteen years, queen, I shall have the woods for my only habitation, and, far away from daintily spread meals, I shall find my nourishment in roots and wild fruit."

It seems here that the firm, courageous man feels the need of being pitied and consoled. What a prospect for him who expected a throne! It was too much. Kausalyā faints. Rāma runs to her, lifts her up; like a pious son he wipes off with his own hands the dust that soils the white garments of his mother, and Kausalyā, on regaining consciousness, but distracted with sorrow, allows the secret of a whole life of grief to escape.

"Would to heaven, Rāma, that thou hadst not been born my son, thou who quickenest all my grief! I should not then feel to-day the pain caused by my separation from thee!

"True, the barren woman has indeed her grief, but it is only that of saying 'I have no children!' It is not equal to the grief that the separation from a beloved son causes us mothers.

"Since the day when thy father gave me the conjugal kiss, the king's favours have never fallen upon me. I have long hoped for them through thee, they will come at last, I said, through the medium of my son"

Now this last hope has vanished; now, she, the first of the royal spouses, will remain without support, a prey to the insults of the proud rival who has already made her suffer

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. xvii.

so much! Of what use her patience of eighteen years, her fervent prayers to the gods, and her rigid mortifications? Ah, that death might come; *that* will be her refuge!

"And Rāma," suddenly cried the poor mother, beside herself, "thou oughtest not to obey the word of a father blinded by love: Leave not Ayodhyā! What can the monarch do to thee, worn out by old age? Thou shalt not go, my son, if thou wishest me to live!"[1]

That cry answered to the thoughts of the impetuous Lakshmana. "It displeases me, too, noble lady, that this worthy child of Raghu, exiled through a woman's voice, should abandon thus the crown to live in a wood. What absurdity cannot a king utter, fallen under the power of Kaikeyī, a crazy old man, weakened through love and overruled by a woman!"

Why should the innocent Rāma be the victim of an odious machination? The people are yet ignorant of the events of the night. Let Rāma be immediately crowned king of Ayodhyā, and while he is receiving the holy chrism, Lakshmana, standing beside him, shall pierce with his swift arrows any who might dare to oppose the ceremony

Kausalyā approves of this plan, and in the name of duty she commands her son to follow, by obeying the voice of a mother, the example of the gods themselves; she warns him, if he resists, of the anger of heaven

Rāma, "the very incarnation of duty," prostrates himself before her. "It is in no way permitted to me to transgress the words of my father I pray thee, my head bowed at thy feet, to accept my excuse, I shall carry out my father's word. Certainly I shall not be the only one who ever obeyed the voice of a father!"

He cites, among other examples, that of Parasu-Rāma,[2] who according to his father's command killed, without hesitating, the mother whom he loved. Then, addressing Lakshmana the prince gently rebukes him for his youthful ardour. What makes him unhappy is not the prospect of

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap xviii

[2] "Parasu-Rāma (the Rāma of the axe), a personage who passes for having nearly destroyed the race of the Kshattriyas, at a very ancient date He is regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu" *Hitopadesa*, translation of M Lancereau, alphabetical table.

exile, but the remembrance of the sufferings brought by Kaikeyī on Dasaratha. "Calm thyself, virtuous Lakshmana, if thou wishest to do what is agreeable to me. Adherence to duty is the greatest of riches, duty stands unchangeable."

What does it signify to him that the command to exile himself emanated from the mouth of Kaikeyī? Was not his father's silence an acquiescence? His mother, a woman of all goodness, would she wish him to transgress the holy laws of honour and filial respect? He even excuses Kaikeyī, and if he departs immediately it is to assure her repose. Besides, has not Kaikeyī lavished upon him, but lately, marks of maternal tenderness? Has she ever up to that fatal day made any distinction between the child of her bosom and the sons of her rivals? Fate alone has disturbed her reason, Fate then alone is guilty.

"How could she, so refined in nature, she, born of a family of holy kings, she, so virtuous, how could *she* have spoken to me thus, in the presence of her husband, my father, as a woman of low condition alone would have done?

"But Fate is by nature despotic, blind, unintelligent . . .

"Who then, son of Sumitrā, has strength enough to battle against Fate? There are no means in this world to bind him!"[1]

And he prays Lakshmana to respect, even in his thoughts, that young mother led on to evil, not by her own will, but by her fate.

But Lakshmana is indignant at Rāma's resignation. If such is duty, then duty becomes odious to him. "The monarch acts, in this matter, seduced by love, not led by justice." And he curses Kaikeyī. If Fate is guilty, then is Fate invincible? Here humanity asserts its rights, and one is happy and surprised to hear from the inmost heart of India these words: "The man who bows his head before Fate is a coward, void of all courage. But the courageous man, having a heart full of energy, dares to resist Fate."

We regret not being able to quote in full the discourse of Sumitrā's son, where one admires the god in Rāma and the man in Lakshmana. One likes to see by the side of the prince, heroically faithful to duty, the ardent youth, whose voice

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap xix.

is eloquently raised in favour of free-will, of human dignity, and who, instead of submitting mankind to the decrees of Fate, would embolden it to fight and make it even conquer Fate.

Rāma succeeds in calming Lakshmana, and prays him to watch over their mothers, and to treat them all with the same affection; but Lakshmana wants to follow him into exile, and Rāma yields at last to his brother's supplication.

Meanwhile Kausalyā had remained silent: she had even admired her son's greatness of soul, and had clasped him in her arms, bathing him in her tears; but now before Rāma's immovable firmness, and of Lakshmana's submission, she feels her allayed sorrow awakening again. In vain she explains to the prince all the care lavished upon him during his infancy; in vain she repeats that maxim of Manu, which raises the mother above the father; in vain she threatens to kill herself, Rāma is inexorable In his turn he respectfully reminds her of the deference due from a wife even to a fallen husband, and he counsels her not to overwhelm with reproaches his father, now so unhappy, but to regard Kaikeyī as a sister, and to love Bharata like a son. Yielding to all these tender remonstrances, she wishes at least to accompany Rāma to the forests. He opposes her wish, saying a wife's place is beside her husband.

"To this discourse of Rāma's," continues the poet, "in which the respect felt for the mother is mingled with exhortations to duty, Kausalyā replies, her eyes bathed in tears:—

"Go my son! May happiness accompany thee! Even execute the order of thy father! At thy return, happy and in good health, my eyes shall see thee again some day. Yes! I shall take delight in obeying my husband as thou hast told me I should, and I shall do all that should be done. Go then, and may happiness follow thee!" [1]

Hardly had she pronounced these words, when repenting having said them, she again begs her son to take her with him. Rāma at last succeeds in dissuading her; whereupon she begins the preparation for the imposing religious ceremony which is to precede his departure.

She purifies herself with water, and lays at the feet of the altars flowers, clarified butter, and sweet perfumes. She

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap xxiv.

gives Rāma part of the consecrated offering, throws her arms round him, presses her lips upon her son's forehead, and then, binding his right hand with the magic plant which annihilates the Rākshasas, she murmurs the farewell prayer. She invokes the gods, the tutelary spirits, all the powers of nature that she propitiates or adjures. Several times she folds the young man to her heart for a last embrace. After prostrating himself before his mother, Rāma goes to his palace, and passes through to Sītā's apartment, where, happy and palpitating, she was impatiently awaiting the time for the coronation.

She runs to meet him for whose return she was longing. The altered countenance of her husband alarms her. What is it, then? Has some sinister omen postponed the solemnity? Why do not the parasol, the fly-flap, the fan, the emblems of royalty, surround the youthful king? Why do not the poets, bards, panegyrists celebrate him with songs? Why does not the holy chrism stream from his forehead? Why do not the principal citizens and the heads of the guilds attend their new sovereign to-day? Why does not the majestic elephant follow his chariot? Why does not the fiery steed precede it?

Then Rāma, addressing the noble instincts of the princess, exhorts her to be firm No more royalty, but exile! No more worldly pomp, but the horrors of the forest! No more love, but separation!

Here a scene takes place, indescribable in its effect. Sītā energetically repels the very thought of being separated from her husband, and endeavours to make Rāma flinch from his resolve, who, on his side orders her to remain with her new family

"Separated from thee, I should not wish to dwell even in heaven I swear it to thee, noble child of Raghu, by thy love and by thy life! Thou art my lord, my guru,[1] my way, my very divinity; with thee then shall I go; it is my final resolve.

"If thou art in such haste to enter the thorny unpassable forest, I will walk before thee, bearing down with my feet the tall grass and the thorns, to open a passage for thee.

[1] Spiritual preceptor.

"Grant me this favour; that I may go, if only I am in thy company, into the heart of these woods, full only of lions, elephants, tigers, wild-boars, and bears!" [1]

Her young imagination flies charmed towards those solitudes of savage grandeur where, alone with Rāma, clothed in the penitential dress, she will enjoy with her husband the beauties of nature and will be defended by him from all dangers that might threaten their happy life

"What an amusement for me, noble child of Raghu, to plunge beneath the transparent water, where flocks of swans and ducks play in their lotus groves. I desire to dwell with thee amidst the joys of these forests, amidst these shady, delicious scenes, perfumed by the scent of many flowers. There, even many millions of years spent near thee would seem to my soul to have lasted only one single day"

Finally, the feeling of duty doubling in her soul the strength of passion, makes her utter these words which reveal her very soul

"Paradise without thee would be an abode odious to me, and even hell with thee cannot be otherwise than a favoured heaven. My father, my mother, and all my relations, worthy child of Raghu, did they not leave me in thy hands, giving me this precept? 'Thou oughtest not to have any other habitation but thy husband's'"

Rāma resists· "Sītā, thy origin is of the highest nobility, the sense of duty thou hast in perfection, thy fame encircles thee like a diadem, therefore, it becomes thee to listen to and follow my word. I leave my soul here with thee; only with my body shall I go into the midst of the forests, obeying, in spite of my will, the order emanating from my father." [2]

After words of such tender delicacy and such profound feeling, he describes the sojourn in a wild wood in all its desolation; the roaring of the lion and the tiger, the trumpeting of the elephant, the hiss of the serpent, the difficulty of the journey, and above all, the absence of all human beings. Delicate, how could she endure a bed of leaves, meals of bitter fruit, sometimes even the deprivation of all food? Elegant, how could she bear to see herself soiled with the dust

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. xxv
[2] Ibid., chap xxviii

and mire of the road, her face tanned by the sun's heat, her hair turned up negligently in a knot? The anchorite, alone in his fervour and faith can find contentment in the continual mortification of self.

"Stay here; thou shalt not the less for that dwell in my heart; and if thou remainest here, thou shalt not, my well-beloved, be the further from my thoughts."

Tearfully, Sītā answers for her courage. What matter perils to her? The dangers against which her Rāma shall defend her would only be an additional delight. What matters to her the austerity of a hermitage? Already as a child when the Brāhmans predicted her future, they announced that one day she should go to live in the forests; and she had often dreamed since, in the midst of courtly pleasures, of the severe charms of the contemplative life. Besides, is not devotion to a husband the way to salvation? The wife who sacrifices herself to her husband in this life, will enjoy eternal felicity with him above. Why should Rāma deprive his partner of happiness upon earth and of glory in heaven? She will die if he forsakes her.

As she thus spoke, sobbing violently, Rāma looked at her, turned away his face, and remained silent

Sītā rebels against this calm opposition She considers that the conduct of a husband is cowardly if he leaves to the mercy of a rival the young wife who, as a virgin, plighted her troth to him. Is she guilty of some involuntary fault? let him pardon her for it, but let him not abandon her, let him not be the cause of a violent death to her. Excited, as she was, by indignation and grief, this last feeling quite carries her away, after this effort, she sinks down exhausted at the hero's knees, and with a voice choked with heart-rending sobs, cries, breathless and distracted, "Save me! . . . Take me with thee!"

Till now the prince had controlled himself He had accepted his misfortune with the divine smile of resignation; he had borne the sight of a mother's despair; but before this loved wife, bent groaning at his feet, imploring as a favour the right to sacrifice herself, his measureless grief, hitherto suppressed, bursts forth :—

"Struck to the heart by these piteous words Rāma,

in the fever of his grief, shed burning tears, though his soul was armed with steadfastness." [1]

Bending towards Sītā he raises her lovingly. "Even heaven without thee would have no charms for me, woman of the gentle features! and my heart is inaccessible to all fear even in face of Swayambhu, the self-existing Being."

He confesses to Sītā that he has never thought of living away from her. He was aware of a devotion, the strength of which he only wished to prove, and which, in his delicate tenderness, he might have feared to abuse, if he had not reminded the young wife what she was risking for him.

"Then come, follow me, if it pleases thee, my beloved! I wish always to do that which is agreeable to thy heart, O woman worthy of all respect! Give our garments and our ornaments as presents to the virtuous Brāhmans, and to all those who have found a refuge in our assistance. Afterwards, when thou hast bid adieu to those to whom thy homage is due, come with me, charming daughter of the king Janaka!"

Lakshmana has witnessed this scene. Rāma turns towards him. Since Sītā also abandons the palace of Ayodhyā, who will console Kausalyā and Sumitrā? Let Lakshmana remain to protect and defend them But the young man embraces the knees of his brother and of his sister-in-law, with tears he implores the favour of accompanying them. Has not Bharata a noble heart? Will he not watch over the forsaken ones? Ah! that Rāma might permit the son of Sumitrā to serve him. When the charming Videhin is reposing near her husband, Lakshmana will keep watch over their sleep And Rāma consents

After that the three young people had stripped themselves of their treasures in favour of their dependents and of the poor, Rāma, carrying, beside his arms, spade and basket, goes, followed by his brother and his wife, to take leave of his father. The crowd pressed upon their passage, no longer joyous, but sad; no longer triumphant, but dejected. The women appeared again at their windows and saluted the exiles with looks full of grief and sympathy. No longer on a chariot does Rāma advance, but on foot; and the

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. xxx.

inhabitants do not forget Sitā in giving expression to the grief they feel at this heart-rending spectacle.

"She, Sitā, of whom lately the gods themselves, passing through the air, could not obtain a sight, is now exposed to the gaze of all the vulgar crowd in the highway of the king.

"The wind, the heat, the cold, will efface all Sitā's freshness, she whose face with its charming complexion is adorned with nature's colours."[1]

Will they abandon their adored prince? No, they will desert Ayodhyā with him, transport their riches, flocks, and tools, to the forest, when Rāma will go, and there found a new town —

"Let our houses with decayed floors, rotten roofs, stripped of their treasures, their rooms given over to dust and dirt, empty of riches and of provisions, forsaken by us, deserted by all the gods, inhabited only by Pisāchas,[2] by the ghosts of the dead, and by Rākshasas, who find their accustomed feasts in the refuse of food: let our houses reduced to this state become the worthy heritage of Kaikeyī!

"Let the forest where this noble child of Raghu goes become henceforth our city!

"Let this town abandoned by us, be reduced to the condition of a wilderness! Yes! Where this magnanimous hero shall live, *there* will our town be!

"Serpents, birds, elephants, gazelles, quit the caverns and the woods Abandon the places you now inhabit and come to inhabit those we are abandoning!"

While Rāma is directing his way towards the palace, Dasaratha, having overwhelmed Kaikeyī with reproaches, begins to wish for, without daring to hope for it, disobedience on the part of his son The very moment when he is expressing his remorse, Rāma is announced, and the feeble old man again loses all consciousness Sumitrā tells him that the prince is accompanied by Sitā and Lakshmana. The king sends for the inmates of his gynæceum, three hundred and fifty women flock into the hall Rāma appears Dasaratha rises, and rushes from his throne with outstretched hands

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap xxxiii

[2] The vampires of India

towards the exile: "Come, Rāma, come, my son." [1] And Rāma receives in his trembling arms his fainting father.

Restored by the princes and by the gentle Sītā, the old man offers his kingdom to Rāma: Rāma refuses it. At least allow him to accompany him · Rāma refuses. Let him consent to pass one more night in the palace to console Kausalyā and to enjoy for the last time the pleasures of the throne; Rāma again refuses

Finally, Dasaratha orders the charioteer Sumantra tor direct his armies and his treasures to follow his son "Let Bharata be king then in this town spoiled of its riches, but let the fortunate Rāma see his desires fulfilled in the depth of the wood!" [2]

Kaikeyī becomes livid, her fiery, reddened eyes dart forth fury and hate; in a hoarse, broken voice, she hurls a gross insult at the monarch. "If thou thus takest away the best part of the kingdom, which thou didst give me with perfidious faith, like a liquor the essence of which thou hast already drunk, thou wilt be a lying king!"

Dasaratha takes up the attack, a new dispute begins, and Rāma again intervenes What could he do with the pompous equipage of royalty, he who desires to give himself up to penitence? Rāma wishes for nothing else than the bark dress of a penitent

The impudent Kaikeyī has the audacity herself to present the bark garment to the heroic young man He throws off the elegant stuffs draped around his person, and calmly puts on, as also does Lakshmana, the penitential garb, but when, in the midst of the general stupor, the stepmother hands to Sītā the rude garment that must replace her silken robe, the young wife shrinks back, blushing and frightened, and seeks refuge near her protector, asking him, weeping · "How must I manage, say, noble husband, to fasten around me these bark garments?" [3]

And with adorable awkwardness, dressed as she was, she throws one part over her dress, and, greatly embarrassed, looks at the other, not knowing much where to put it on.

[1] As Mr Monier Williams remarks, all Dasaratha's misfortunes are caused by polygamy while Rāma, who has only one wife, is happy, with her, and is ever faithful to her (Cf *Indian Epic Poetry*)

[2] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. xxxvi

[3] Ibid., chap xxxvii

A burst of indignation breaks forth against Kaikeyī: "Oh shame!" exclaim the women of the gynæceum, "oh, shame!"

While the king is expressing his indignation against this last outrage inflicted upon a wife who is voluntarily sacrificing herself, Rāma again speaks He goes, but he is leaving behind him an unhappy one who is dying of grief at his leaving her. Who else but her legal protector will defend and console her? The tears of Kausalyā's husband answer for him.

Dasaratha causes his daughter-in-law to be arrayed in jewels and splendid stuffs. "The princess of the gracious countenance illuminated all the palace as the pure light of the sun illuminates a cloudless sky."[1]

Kausalyā tenderly embraces the young wife, brilliant in her array; she recognizes the purity of her race in the loftiness of her resolution, and recommends her to persevere in her duty.

Sītā respectfully represents to her that for a long time she has unswervingly followed in the path of a faithful wife, and one feels in her answer the aristocratic scorn of a daughter of the Aryas. "What! I, a woman of rank, how, noble lady, can I, like women of no birth, despise my husband, who is a god to me and the dispenser of all pleasure? Most certainly, I am ready to sacrifice my life even for love to my husband: it is the vow to which I bound myself, the day that my hand was given him upon the altar!" She thanks her for sanctioning the great principles which she is happy in following out

"Princess of Mithilā, my daughter," said the royal spouse proudly, "nothing astonishes me in this language of thine, thou who of yore, opening the bosom of the earth, wert born of a furrow, like a fortunate seed.

"Thou art the ornament, the equal, in virtues and in glory, of the magnanimous king of Mithilā, this great Janaka, the very Indra of men! I am happy and proud of my connexion with thee, illustrious woman, so well instructed in the virtues, in duty, and in gratitude."

She confesses that she has no longer any fears for Rāma, now that the virtuous Sītā accompanies him, she recommends to her Lakshmana, the darling brother, who is entirely devoted

[1] Ibid, chap xxxviii

to her. Then addressing Rāma she reminds him also of his duty towards Sītā and Lakshmana: this astonishes the hero.

"Why thus counsellest thou me, mother, in regard to Sītā?

"Lakshmana is my right arm, and the princess of Mithilā my shadow. In fact, it is as impossible for me to leave Sītā as it is for the wise man to abandon his glory!"

Indra himself would tremble before his arrows. What then have those protected by him to fear?

After having asked pardon of all the women of the gynæceum for faults that he may have committed towards them, he performs to his father and mother the salutation called *pradakshina*, which consists in walking round the person one wishes to honour

Lakshmana follows Rāma's example; then approaching Sumitrā, he clasps the feet of his mother, who praises him for sacrificing to an elder brother the pleasures of the domestic hearth. In the eyes of the law the elder brother is a father: his wife, a mother; and Sumitrā prays Rāma to protect the young brother who will defend and obey him as a son

A splendid chariot now awaits the exiled ones, the moment of departure has arrived

When the inhabitants of Ayodhyā see Rāma and his companions going towards the gates of the town, they run to him, "as," says the poet, "one runs to the water during the devouring heat of summer."[1]

They beg the charioteer to check the horses that they might look for the last time upon those whom the more aged amongst them cannot hope to see again

"The mother of Rāma," they say, "has she then a heart of iron? if so, it is solidly joined together, since it does not break when she sees her beloved son depart to dwell in the forests. Alone, she does a virtuous act, this young Videhan of slender figure, who attaches herself to her husband's steps as the shadow follows the body"

Suddenly a great noise is heard . What can it be? . He who only showed himself to the people in his royal chariot, the women whom the shade of the gynæceum hid from the

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap xxxix.

vulgar gaze—Dasaratha and his wives—have rushed forth from the castle and are following on foot the chariot that is carrying away all that they love the best. The old king calls to his son, to his daughter-in-law; Kausalyā breathlessly holds out her arms to them . . . "Stop, stop!" cries Dasaratha to the charioteer. "Drive on," says Rāma, feeling his courage giving way: "When thou shalt have returned to the king, say to him: 'I did not hear.' Charioteer, to prolong grief is to make it the more cruel."

The chariot was now far away, the wives of the citizens ceased to pursue it, and followed it only with their eyes bathed in tears . . .

Then a stern voice was heard: "Follow not for far, him whom you will see again!" the Brāhmans were saying to the monarch. Dasaratha stops; but the inmates of the gynæceum continue to sigh and to be anxious about the fate of him who loved them and who had made the yoke of Kaikeyī less bitter to them.

Dasaratha sinks to the ground again, and Kausalyā and Kaikeyī run to him, he repulses the latter and leans upon the former. Returned to the palace, where everything reminds him of the absent ones, he says to his servants:—

"Let me be conducted as soon as possible to the apartment of Kausalyā, the mother of my son Rāma."[1]

The son's exile becomes the triumph of the poor mother.

The most attached to Rāma of the inhabitants of Ayodhyā have followed him Old Brāhmans, leaving their wives under the safeguard of honour, join them, carrying the sacred books and the utensils of sacrifice.

The banks of the Tamasā are reached. The dying rays of daylight feebly light up the forest. It is their first night of exile. Rāma thinks of his father, of "his holy mother", and suffers only because of their grief. He feels happy at having near him his wife and the courageous Lakshmana: "In following my steps, O most valiant of men, thou hast truly done a signal act of nobleness: thy companionship for the defence of my dear Videhan was the very thing to be desired!"[2]

Lakshmana assists Sumantra to prepare a bed of leaves for

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. xli.
[2] Ibid., chap. xliv.

the husband and wife. Gazing on them for a long time, he rejoices over their peaceful slumber that he guards, and talks over his brother's virtues with the faithful servant.

Those who have accompanied the princes of Ayodhyā are sleeping, stretched upon the grass. In the middle of the night Rāma awakes: he wishes to leave his brother citizens while they are yet asleep. The three exiles mount the chariot, and Rāma orders Sumantra, when returning, to make false tracks in order to baffle the people of Ayodhyā, and to prevent their rejoining them in the wood of mortification.

Thus, when they awake, the citizens find themselves alone; they sadly regain their homes, but their wives, receiving them with bitter reproaches, incite them to retrace their steps.

Continuing their journey, the newly made anchorites admire the charming scenery that now surrounds them, and receive, as they go, marks of love from people who curse Kaikeyī.

The night following, one more friend watches beside Rāma. Guha, the king of Nishāda, his old friend, comes to salute him on his way, and talks with Lakshmana while Rāma and Sītā sleep. Lakshmana asks himself sadly whether the young couple and he shall ever see again the dear ones they have left; whether Kausalyā, Sumitrā, and the king have been able to bear these last hours of mortal grief. And Guha weeps.

The song of the Koil[1] announces the return of day. Rāma dismisses Sumantra; henceforth he has no more need of the chariot. He prays the faithful charioteer to tell his father of his love and his respect, to convey his wishes for the happiness of all the royal spouses, and "twice and more still" to Kaikeyī in his name and in those of Lakshmana and Sītā. "May Bharata treat his mothers with equal tenderness and Kausalyā and Sumitrā regard Kaikeyī's child as their own son."

This magnanimity exasperates Lakshmana. He also has a message to send to his father. Dasaratha, slave to a woman, sacrifices a son for her, and such a son. Anger makes the

[1] Coīl, or Kokila, black cuckoo (*Cuculus indicus*). The Hindus delight in the song of this bird, whose love in spring with the flower of the mango is as often celebrated in Sanskrit poetry as that of the nightingale and the rose in other literatures. The kokila deposits its eggs in the crow's nest in order to have them hatched.

young man disregard all filial respect. Rāma rushes in front of him, and with a sad heart forbids Sumantra to repeat to the old king words that would kill him.

Dreading to return to Ayodhyā without the illustrious exile and to carry to Kausalyā the confirmation of the misfortune that had befallen her, Sumantra is reluctant to leave his young master, but Rāma orders him to go; Kaikeyī will be reassured on seeing the empty chariot.

The exiles prepare to cross the Ganges; a boat waits for them, and Rāma says to his brother: "Lift gently in thy arms and place in the bark my dear penitent Sītā." [1]

And the poet adds with gentle liveliness:—

"It is his to obey immediately the order which his brother gave him, and to execute a task which was in no way disagreeable to him."

From the bank Guha, his ministers, and Sumantra watched the boat recede, their gaze dimmed by tears.

The waves murmured. The frail craft, lifted up and down by the tumultuous waters of the sacred river, soon found itself at an equal distance from the two shores.

Sītā, joining her hands, prayed.—

"Defended by thee, divine Gangā, may this son of the wise and powerful king Dasaratha carry out the command that he has received from his noble father! May he, when he shall have passed fourteen years in the lonely forest, may he return to the great town with me, accompanied by his brother!

"Then, returned under a happy star, filled with joy and after the fulfilment of all my desires, I shall offer thee my sacrifices, goddess of the limpid feet, O celestial Gangā! thou who, still named Tripathagā, comest from the world of Brahma, and showest thyself to us in this world, the spouse of the king of the waters!

"It is thee whom I adore here, beautiful goddess: to thee I now address my homage.

"Once my noble husband has remounted the throne, and I have myself happily returned with him to his palace, I shall give garments, jewels, and hundreds of thousands of cows to the Brāhmans only through the desire to do a thing which may be agreeable to thee."

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap lii

The bark reaches the opposite shore, and the princes worship the river which has respected their life.

They have entered the forest of exile. From the opposite shore their faithful friends see them enter the leafy avenues, and Rāma's eyes are wet with tears as he casts a farewell glance on Guha and Sumantra.

"Walk before, son of Sumitrā, and, Sītā, come after; I shall go last myself, in order to protect Sītā and thee! It is to-day that my dear Videhan will learn the evils of a habitation in the midst of the woods; she will be obliged to hear the savage concerts of boars, tigers, and lions!"

But the forest is only showing itself now in its most smiling aspect. Instead of the roaring of wild beasts, it echoes only the song of birds of brilliant plumage, summer has not as yet deepened the thick foliage, but spring has clothed the trees in tender green and in those flowers which open out the first under the soft beams of the genial sun

The nyagrodha, the fig-tree of India, offers a shelter to the exiles beneath its magnificent arches They rest there, and Rāma makes his friends notice at a short distance off a lake whose waters are veiled by the blue lotus, the nenuphar, among which are sporting swans, ducks, and reddish geese Afar off rises the mountain Chitrakūta, the future theatre of one of the most dramatic periods of their life A river flows from thence, in it they quench their thirst while a fallow-deer killed by the two brothers is broiling on live coals

After the repast comes the hour for repose.

For the first time since their exile, no friend watches over them. Rāma deeply feels the abandonment, but striving to conquer his emotion, he tries to warn Lakshmana against the same feelings, adding: "Counting from this day, we must, you and I, Lakshmana, guard continually and without negligence the safety of Sītā"[1]

They lay down, all three, upon beds of grass, and, like a bow which breaks when stretched too far, Rāma's firmness gradually leaves him and his human nature reacts upon his divine essence He fears lest the impious work of Kaikeyī might be crowned by the death of Dasaratha; he is astonished at the king's weakness in sacrificing an honest son to a capricious favourite, he envies the fate of Bharata; he

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap liii

pities Kausalyā and Sumitrā; he trembles for them, and supplicates Lakshmana to run and succour them; he is nearly tempted to retract his noble resolutions; at last he loses all mastery over himself, and sobs rend his manly bosom. Lakshmana gently reproves a fit of despair, which frightens those who only live for him, and Rāma, mastering himself, presses to his heart the brother who thus recalls him to duty.

"I have thrown off, thanks to thee," he says to him, "I have thrown off at last the yoke of grief!"

Next day, on resuming their journey, they see smoke ascending at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamunā, which announces the proximity of a hermitage. They advance in this direction. Before the sacrificial fire is seated the anchorite Bharadwāja, surrounded by Brāhmans; the very birds are assisting at the ceremony, and the gazelles lying down near them gaze with wondering eyes at the movements of the ascetics. Bharadwāja receives the exiles with kindness, he proposes that they should live in his hermitage; but Rāma finding this solitude too near to Ayodhyā, he informs him of the mountain Chitrakūta, describes to him its beauties, and the happiness he will feel in leading forth to view them his pure and gracious spouse, for whom the anchorite shows a most touching interest.

The Yamunā intervenes between the mountain and the noble travellers.

The two brothers construct a raft on which Rāma places Sītā "trembling like a liana", and here again, the crossing accomplished, the princes salute the river and Sītā prays to her for those whom they leave behind

They build a hermitage. Branches of trees form its walls, which are bound and bedecked with woodbine; a roof of leaves covers it, and Sītā coats with clay the two compartments of the hut.

While the three young people were full of ineffable joy at the idea of passing years together in such an enchanting spot, Sumantra was re-entering Ayodhyā. He returned sad, discouraged, and greeted with cries of grief and reproach from the citizens, whose wives cried :—

"What, this unhappy one! he has left Rāma and returned!" [1]

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. lvii.

He enters the palace of the seven walls, and there the words of the women of the gynæceum increase his affliction. Moving along the terraces, they say :—

"Gone out with Rāma and returned without Rāma, how will this charioteer answer the questions of Kausalyā? Death, in our opinion, would be as sweet to him as it is painful to Kausalyā to live, now that they have banished her well-beloved son who is to her the breath of life!"

Introduced into the presence of the monarch, Sumantra delivers Rāma's message; Dasaratha faints, and the women of the gynæceum hasten to him, with the exception of Kaikeyī; and whilst helping to lift her royal husband, Kausalyā breaks forth into bitter complaints Why has he not the courage to interrogate the messenger, when he had courage enough to send away his son? Kaikeyī, however, is not there And the poor mother throws herself sobbing upon the ground

The echoes of the town repeat the groans of the palace, and men and women weep in Ayodhyā.

In vain Sumantra reassures Kausalyā of the safety of the exiles. She repels all consolation. At the thought of these children of kings deprived of the necessaries of life, and exposed to the dangers of a savage solitude, she is filled with indignation and despair In language, doubtless too severe for the poor old man, but of incomparable majesty and eloquence, she reproaches the monarch for having broken the promise he had given to Rāma, when he said. "I wish to consecrate thee to-morrow."[1]

"Here is a sloka, powerful king, drawn from a Purāna, famous distich upon earth, sung of yore by the self-existent Being, when he weighed truth —

"'I have put in the scales of my balance, on one truth, on the other a thousand asvamedhas,[2] and I have weighed them, but I see that truth alone weighs down the thousand sacrifices.'

"Thence it happens that virtuous men defend truth even at the price of their life in fact, there does not exist in the three worlds, a duty superior to that due to truth."

. . . . . .

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap lxi

[2] The asvamedha is the sacrifice of the horse

It is by truth that the sun warms; it is by truth that the moon revolves in her phases; from truth did the immortal ambrosia emerge; the very foundations of the world are based on truth.

"Virtue, which is figured under the emblem of a bull standing upon four feet, holy virtue consists in truth . . .

"Truth is in the words and sincerity in the promises of kings, and their duty is to walk, king of men, in those paths which their noble ancestors have followed before them.

"There are two roads indicated by the wise men, O most excellent of beings who have received their share of judgment; it is meekness and truth, the foundation itself of virtue.

"This virtue, defended by men of goodness, thou hast killed with thine own hand; thou hast sacrificed thy renown, when thou didst wrongly think thou wert performing a duty.

"The perfume of flowers can never go against a breath of wind, but the virtue of men exhales a perfume which spreads on every side The richest scent of aloes and sandalwood does not last so long, my lord, as perfumes distilled from the glory of men"

It is worthy of remark that the most sublime accents that the defence of truth have inspired in the ancient poets of India are found on the lips of two women: Kausalyā and Sacuntalā! But, soon, to these grave, solemn words, which seem the voice of conscience herself, succeed bitter insulting expressions: the remembrance of the king's virtues will be for ever effaced from the memory of man by the crime which has stained him. Besides, why complain? On the contrary, why not praise the moderation of Kaikeyī, who might just as well have asked the king to inflict death upon Rāma? Certainly she might have obtained her request!

The counsels that her son gave her before departing return to Kausalyā's mind; she reproaches herself for her cruelty; then she begins again her lamentations, her bitter reprimands. At last the old man implores her for a little pity, and the queen, struck with grief at having insulted a man who ought to be to her a god incarnate, supplicates him in her turn to pardon her. In the name of what she has suffered, she believes she has deserved to be pardoned. Calmed, the king fell asleep.

There is in this poem a woman's character that is truly

Spartan; it is nevertheless kept in the shade; namely, Sumitrā's.

A short while ago, without a moment of weakness, she approved the plan for her son, Lakshmana, to follow Rāma into the forest. Again now, she exhorts Kausalyā to cast out all fear, to have faith in the future, and to believe in the triumph of goodness. Wherefore pity the man who has sacrificed material pleasures to the satisfaction of a duty accomplished? Heaven is just, and will compensate with a glorious reward the martyr of virtue. Wherefore pity Lakshmana, who follows a tenderly loved brother? Wherefore pity Sītā, "this vase of glory," who voluntarily, knowingly, has sacrificed her luxurious habits to conjugal love? Besides, nature will only have for Rāma perfumes and smiles All dangers will be overcome by the divine weapons which he possesses. And what peril could menace him, when Sītā watches over him like the goddess of fortune? A day will come in which the tears of grief shed by Kausalyā will be changed into tears of joy, when she will press to her bosom the exile, become a king

At these wise remonstrances, at this joyous hope, Kausalyā feels the bitterness of her trouble to be dispelled, and allows herself to fall into a refreshing slumber

The king did not leave Kausalyā any more. On the sixth day of his grief he was reposing near the mother of Rāma In the middle of the night, sleep forsook him. A melancholy remembrance of his youth had suddenly presented itself to his mind.[1]

"If thou art awake, Kausalyā," he said to the queen, "listen attentively to my discourse When a man has done a deed, whether good or evil, noble lady, he cannot avoid eating the fruits of it, which are brought him in the succession of time."[2]

He then evokes a scene from the past. He was young and ardent; he loved to hunt the wild beasts of the forest and to pierce them with his arrows. One day he was watching on the banks of the river Sarayu. He thought he heard a noise like that made by an elephant. He stretched his

[1] M. le baron Guerrier de Dumast has translated this episode in beautiful verse See *Flowers of India*

[2] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap lxv

bow, the arrow flew . . . a human groan filled him with terror. He had hit Yajnadatta,[1] a young ascetic, the only support of old and blind parents, and, according to the heart-rending expression of the youth, the same blow had struck them all three.

Dasaratha remembered the generosity of the son when he declared that his crime was small, for he had not killed a Brāhman (for the mother of Yajnadatta was of Sudra blood); he remembered the anxiety of the two old people waiting for him, who would no more return; their joy on hearing the murderer arrive, whom they mistook to be their child; his despair on announcing to them the horrible news, and on guiding their trembling feet towards the corpse of the son of whom he has deprived them; their keen grief, especially the mother's, devouring with kisses the cold face of the child, the heart-rending expression with which the father asked, "who will now bring to the poor mother roots and fruit?", the apotheosis of Yajnadatta, mounting towards heaven, and praying the Brāhman to pardon Dasaratha for an involuntary murder, last, he remembered that though the anchorite did not curse him, yet he predicted that he should die one day without pressing to his heart, in a last embrace, the son for whose sight he should ardently long. He now feels that this sinister prophecy is being fulfilled. He yearns to see his well-loved Rāma; and whilst calling to him with a faltering voice, which gradually gets weaker, he falls asleep. The night covered with its shadow this lamentable scene, the queen did not see the pallor of Dasaratha's face or the increasing dullness of his eyes . . . but in the morning when the bards enter the sovereign's chamber to intone the morning hymn, Dasaratha is found motionless, the royal spouses are widows.

When, in the midst of the prostration which this new misfortune has plunged her, Kausalyā can at last articulate a word, she gives free expression to her woe. Ah! the king is happy! Heaven has put an end to his sufferings; but she, why has death spared her? Was her grief, then, less deep? The sting of remorse also tortures her; did she not poison with bitter reproaches the last hours of the old man?

[1] This name signifies "given by sacrifice".

She supplicates Dasaratha to pardon her, but the sight of the corpse is the only answer.

Then she consigns to hell the woman who has brought misfortune upon the royal house of Ayodhyā: "Receive the fulfilment of thy wishes, Kaikeyī. Enjoy the kingdom at thine ease, and, now that thou hast deprived thy husband of life, woman abandoned to scorn, be happy if thou canst be."[1] She hopes for an avenger in the son of Kaikeyī herself . . . Whom will Kausalyā pity? for whom will she weep? Him who is dead, or those who are still suffering? For Dasaratha, or for her children? She would like to burn herself upon her husband's pyre, but another voice, that of nature, reminds her that she has yet ties in this world. Her thoughts turn to the forest where the poor exiles wander, Kausalyā will live for them

By Vasistha's order, the women of the gynæceum take in their arms the resisting queen, and drag her away from the chamber of death. Messengers are sent to Bharata, in the questions full of solicitude that he addresses to them about his family, he gives a marked preference to his two stepmothers over his own mother, whom he characterizes as an irascible and selfish woman

They hid from him his father's death, and in the name of the king himself, they prayed him to return to Ayodhyā.

Kaikeyī's punishment is nigh at hand To the young man, who, alarmed at the funereal silence in which Ayodhyā is buried, asks the reason for it, Kaikeyī, glorifying herself, announces the death of the king and the exile of the legitimate heir. Bharata is king, and it is to her that he owes it!

Thunderstruck, Bharata gives vent to his indignation at his mother's crime: "Then shame to thee! Why, if thou wishest, thanks to thy impatient longing after the throne, to go to the lowest depth of hell, why drag me after thee in thy fall? Alas, mother, thy cruelty has killed me . . ."[2]

He cursed her and predicted her eternal punishment. He groaned to see his mother's crime fall back upon his own innocent head, and his despair suggested sinister invectives to his mind —

"My father, who brought thee here for the ruin of this

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap lxviii.

[2] Ibid., chap lxxv

royal family, perceived not that in thee he had taken to himself something similar to the night of death."

She had killed a husband, and banished the tenderly loved brother of Bharata; she had wounded the virtuous Kausalyā in her dearest affections; but she will not enjoy the fruits of so many crimes; Bharata will expiate his mother's fault. After having returned the sceptre to Rāma, he will embrace for fourteen years the ascetic life to which the latter was condemned.

Then, disowning the woman who had given him birth, he exclaimed, distracted: "Oh, woman of unbridled ambition for a kingdom; inhuman, without pity; murderer of thy husband, and my enemy under the appearances of a mother, thou oughtest no longer to call me thy son!"[1]

Heaven was just, and was punishing her for her iniquity even through the voice of the son who was to have received the fruits of it.

The compassion of Bharata for Kausalyā expressed itself in touching terms: "Thou knowest then not the grief felt in the mother's heart at separation from her cherished child, thou, by whom Kausalyā was deprived of her beloved son!"

Mantharā also, the odious instigator of Kaikeyī's faults, shall be punished. By Bharata's order, his faithful Satrughna,[2] the brother of Lakshmana, throws her down, drags her in the dust . . He was about to strike her . . Bharata stops him; one must not kill a woman.

"Restrain, now, thine anger, O thou who knowest thy duty! Her guilty action has already killed the wretch; reflect that she is subject to the will of another, that she is infirm, and above all that she is a woman."[3]

Rāma would not forgive this crime; is it not in remembrance of this virtuous brother that Bharata himself has spared Kaikeyī's life, whose crime he now attributes to fate?

Kausalyā has heard the voice and the tears of the son of Kaikeyī; she runs to meet him at the moment when he is entering her apartments. They fall into each other's arms. A sad memory disturbs this effusion; Bharata is king, but

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. lxxvi.

[2] Satrughna had accompanied Bharata in his voyage to the court of the king of Kekaya.

[3] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. lxxvii.

at what price? The mother of Rāma in bitter tones begs Bharata to guide her to the forests where the exiles are suffering, whilst he enjoys the supreme place. The young prince, painfully impressed, justifies himself with ease, and receives from his stepmother, beside gentle consolation, noble advice upon his duties as king.

But after his father's funeral, Bharata announces officially his renouncement of the throne, he prepares to go to the forests to offer the crown to Rāma, and the whole town follows him on his heroic pilgrimage. The royal mothers accompany the prince; for Kaikeyī he felt scorn and aversion; for Kausalyā respect and love.

When the king Guha, come to meet him, related how he had watched with Lakshmana over the sleep of Rāma and Sītā, Bharata fainted The queens of Ayodhyā hastened to him, and Kausalyā, lifting the drooping head of the son of her adoption, reanimated him by her caresses. She showed all a mother's anxiety for him Has he fallen ill? What would become of the royal family deprived of its last support? Could he have learnt some painful news concerning the fate of the exiles?

"I had only one son, alas!" she murmured, "and he is away in the woods with his spouse!"[1] She sprinkled refreshing water over the pale face of the young man. Bharata opened his eyes, he saw Kausalyā, and folded his arms caressingly round her.

On beholding the ingudī[2] at the foot of which the married couple had reposed, Bharata envies the fate of the beautiful Videhan, to whom is reserved the ineffable joy of suffering for him whom she loves.

The prince and his suite receive in the hermitage of Bharadwāja a fairy-like hospitality When it is time to take leave the royal mothers come to offer their homage to the anchorite, Kaikeyī herself, shame reddening her forehead, approaches the Brāhman, whose feet she embraces.

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap xcv

[2] "Inge, polygamous flowers, in the hermaphrodites, calyx with five sepals, tubular carolla with five petals, numerous stamens, monadelphic, unicellular pod, polyspermic, seeds enveloped in a pulp In the males, ibid; pistil, none Sixty species" (*Merat, Et de bot*), work quoted by M Fauche. "Terminalia Catappa, in Bengal confounded with Putranjīva Roxburghii"

Bharadwāja prays Bharata to introduce each of the three queens to him by name. The prince indicates Kausalyā and Sumitrā with tender and respectful interest; then pointing to Kaikeyī: "Learn," he said, "that she is the woman who, impelled by desire to reign, caused the banishment to these forests of the two valiant sons of the king, and forced the Indra of men, even Dasaratha, to fly from earth to heaven; it is the vile, it is the cruel Kaikeyī; it is the shame of her race; it is the murderess of her husband And this inhuman woman of destestable thoughts, for I recognize in her the source whence came my great misfortune, this Kaikeyī, alas! is my mother." [1]

Tears stifled the voice of the young prince

. . . . . .

While the eager eyes of the people of Ayodhyā search the dense thickets to discover the hermitage of the exiles, while a column of smoke rising into the air betrays their retreat, and Bharata, separating himself from his army, advances towards it, the husband and wife wandering through enchanting forest-scenes, indulge in sweet outpourings of love and admire the surroundings of their new habitation.

Rāma guides his young wife and points out to her the marvels which surround them From the plateau of the Chitrakūta their gaze is directed upwards to the peaks which overlook them and appear to lose themselves in the clouds. The forests encroach upon the slopes of the mountains, the mango joins its clusters of sweet white flowers tinted with red to the purplish flowers of the ebony-tree, to the long yellow panicles of the rose-apple, arbours of clustering bamboos wave in the breath of the wind; elsewhere, the cedar of the Himālayas spreads its tufted branches, which do not extend themselves horizontally like the cedars of Lebanon, but bend down gracefully towards the earth At the feet of the young couple flows the Mandākinī, whose limpid waters are strewn with lotuses, and along whose banks the dhavas [2] bend their long spikes of bright carmine Quite an aerial world people these smiling solitudes How can one describe, after Buffon, those hummingbirds, whose diapered colours glitter in the dazzling light

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap. ci.

[2] *Lythrum fruticosum.*

of the East—those humming birds, with the names and the brilliancy of precious stones, and with the freshness and delicacy of the flowers whose nectar they suck; which never rest upon the earth but flutter from tree-branch to flower and from flower to the blade of grass?

But let Rāma, that is, the poet, speak:—

"Since I have seen this beautiful mountain, Sītā, neither the loss of the crown fallen from my head, nor even this exile far from my friends, torment my soul any longer.

"See, what variety of birds people this mountain, crested with high ridges, full of metals, and higher than even the heavens, so to speak Some resemble ingots of silver, others look like blood, some imitate the colours of the madder or the opal, others have the tints of the emerald, one resembles a carpet of young grass, and one a diamond reflecting light In short, this mountain, embellished everywhere with the variety of its trees, borrows the sparkle of jewels upon its high ridges, rich in metals, haunted by troops of monkeys, and peopled with hyenas tigers, leopards" [1]

The poet seems to have wished to complete the vigorous and warm colouring of his picture by causing the wild beasts to wander over a ground calcined by the sun which allows its ardent rays to reveal the minerals which it contains.

Misty points in the distance afford an agreeable repose from the dazzling spectacle.

"See the Kinnaras,[2] these tutelary spirits of divine forms and celestial intelligence, who amuse themselves joyfully in couples, upon the lovely plateau of this mountain.

"Look, hung upon the branches, these swords and precious robes! Look at these charming places which the wives of the Vidyādharas [3] have chosen for the scene of their games!

"Everywhere one sees here, cascades, springs, streams flow down the mountain . . Into what heart of man could not joy be shed by this sweet odour, exhaled from the mouths of

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap cii

[2] Celestial musicians "But it is singular these musicians have horses' heads" *Chefs d'œuvres du théatre indien*, translated from the original Sanskrit into English by Wilson, and from English into French by Langlois, Paris, 1828

[3] "Vidyādhara (who has a little magic ball) demi-god or fairy who traverses the air and possesses magical power." (M Lancereau, "Hitopadesa") They are the sylphs of India.

these grottoes, exquisite fragrance, sweet pleasure of the sense of smell, where the united perfumes of divers flowers together only make up one single perfume?

"If I must live here more than one autumn with thee, charming wife, and Lakshmana, grief could not kill my soul:

"For, on this beautiful plateau, so enchanting, so haunted by an infinite variety of birds, so rich in all the diversity of fruit and flowers, my desires, noble lady, are fully satisfied.

"By living in these forests I ought to enjoy two beautiful fruits; first, the payment of the debt (i.e. Dasaratha's promise to Kaikeyī) which duty required from my father; and then, a satisfaction given to the wishes of Bharata."

One always sees, even when Vālmīki loads his palette with the richest and most varied colours, even when he displays the greatest luxury of imagery, he makes the moral idea predominant; the satisfaction of duty performed doubles for Rāma the pleasures of his new mode of life.

Then, with loving earnestness and touching solicitude, Sītā's husband adds: "And thou, dear Videhan, feelest thou not pleasure also in contemplating with me, on the Chitrakūta, so many different things, which supply food for conversation, food for both body and soul?

"It is even here, Sītā, that other holy kings, my ancestors, vowing to live in these forests, have desired to drink, after death, of the cup of immortality . . ."

Rāma led his young wife to the borders of the Mandākinī:

"Look at the Mandākinī, this pleasant river, peopled with cranes and swans, veiled by red lotuses and blue water-lilies, shaded by trees of a thousand species, be they flowering or fruit-bearing, the children of its banks—this river, studded with beautiful islets, every part resplendent like the pond of Kuvera, the nursery of the celestial nelumbas.[1]

"I feel that joy is born again in my heart at the sight of these beautiful tirthas, whose waters are disturbed under our very eyes by these troops of gazelles, come to quench their thirst, one troop following another.

"It is the hour when rishis who have arrived at perfection, and whom you see, some robed in the skins of the antelope and in the valkala, some clothed in bark

[1] "Nelumbium-Jussieu. Species of nymphæaceæ created at the expense of the nymphæa nelumbo of Linnæus." (Hoefer, *Dictionnaire de botanique pratique*.)

and with the jatā [1] for their head-dress, come to plunge themselves in the holy river Mandākinī.

"Here are the anchorites who have sworn to remain with their arms always raised, and who, without failing in their vows, adore the sun with a melodious voice . .

. . . . . .

"I do not think that one could find in the pleasure of dwelling in a town absolutely anything that surpasses the happiness of looking upon the Chitrakūta, the Mandākinī, and thy charming self.

. . . . . .

"Plunge thy two hands, that look like petals of the lotus, noble lady, plunge thy hands into this river, the most holy of rivers, pluck its lotuses and drink its limpid water

"Ever imagine, dear wife, that this mountain full of trees, is Ayodhyā full of inhabitants, and that this river is the Sarayū itself" [2]

Again he expresses his rapture at the thought of passing long days of happiness in this residence, with his well-beloved Sītā and his faithful Lakshmana

He then leads his young wife to another part of the mountain There they find a grotto echoing with the twittering of birds, sheltered by a wall of foliage; a bench is already there, and the flowering branches of a tree extend over it their protecting shade, Rāma seats Sītā upon it, and places himself near her. "Seest thou," he continues, "these trees torn by elephants in their fights, how they weep tears of resin . . On every side the crickets murmur an elegy with their prolonged chirping

"Listen to this bird; love for its little ones makes it say: 'Son, son! Son, son!' as my mother used to say it once in a gentle and plaintive voice." [3]

He makes her distinguish the cry of the humming-bird answering the note of the Koïl, which fills the heart of the Hindu with gentle languor. He makes her admire the flexible liana, which, bending under a flowery load, twists itself round

[1] The hair tied up in a knot.
[2] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap civ.
[3] Ibid., chap cv.

the vigorous tree, and he compares it to Sītā, who, tired of her sylvan walks, leans against him for support.

The young wife clings to her husband with her arms. Rāma smiles; applying his wet finger to a rock of red arsenic, he draws the *tilaka* upon the radiant forehead of Sītā, an ornament so much sought after by Indian women: then plucking some of the blue flowers of the silver-leaved nāgkesar [1] and rubbing them in his hand, he anoints the curly hair of his beautiful companion.

They leave the grotto to continue their walk. Sītā, in sudden alarm, hides her head in her husband's bosom; a large monkey, dreadful to look at, is in front of them. Rāma, with fatherly protection pressing Sītā to his heart, reassures her and frightens away the intruding quadrumanous creature. Recovered from her terror, the young wife breaks into a laugh; her brilliant *tilaka* has stamped itself upon her husband's chest, when, trembling with fright, she leant her head there.

Perceiving a grove of asokas, she joyfully drags Rāma thither, and they vie with each other in pulling down the purple clusters of fruit, and in mutually adorning their foreheads.

On their return to the hermitage Lakshmana runs to meet them and shows them the spotless black gazelles struck down by his arrows. He has prepared the repast, and Rāma addressing Sitā, says. "Let the meal be served up to us"

"The noble lady," continues the poet, "commenced by throwing food for the benefit of all living creatures." That done, she places honey and the prepared meat before the two brothers.

This is a curious feature in Indian customs. According to the precepts of Manu, so contradictory in what concerns women, the latter were not permitted to take their repast till after their husbands had left the table; and the princess of Videha, otherwise treated by Rāma and Lakshmana with so much respect and deference, is not exempt from this law.

While Sītā is throwing the remains of the repast to the crows, one of the birds, excited, strikes at her with beak, wings and claws. Rāma smiles at first at the alarm of the



[1] *Mesua ferrea.*

young wife, frightened by such a small bird; but seeing the aggressor's pertinacity, and the victim's terror increase, his anger rises; he bends Siva's bow, and the arrow pursues the bird, which, says the poet, unable to escape the enchanted shaft, wanders through the three worlds. The crow then asks for grace; but the arrow cannot be shot in vain, and Rāma, touched by the bird's plaint, allows it to choose which part of its body will be struck by the magic weapon; the crow sacrifices an eye, and the shaft strikes home.

Suddenly a noise like the roaring of waves is heard from afar; it is the voice of the people of Ayodhyā. Lakshmana climbs a tree to ascertain the cause of this tumult; he recognizes Bharata's standard, the immense ebony-tree carried by an elephant.

Lakshmana burns to fight, to avenge his brother, to kill Bharata and Kaikeyī herself Even alone he will be sufficient for the task, and he prays Rāma to retire into a cavern with Sītā. Rāma energetically defends Bharata, knowing his noble heart. Kaikeyī's son doubtless only comes into the forest to warn Sītā against the perils of her new abode, and to bring her back in triumph to the palace of Ayodhyā

Soon Bharata and Satrughna are at the feet of Rāma, and the three brothers embrace, weeping Rāma inquires with solicitude after the royal family; and with the paternal kindness of an elder brother desires to be informed of the manner in which Bharata assists Dasaratha in governing the kingdom

"Art thou careful to bring comfort to the desolate women, our mothers? Are they well defended by thee? Hast thou not faith in them, and dost thou not confide to them that which should be kept secret?"[1]

Bharata announces to him Dasaratha's death, of this he accuses his guilty mother, and lays at the feet of the legitimate heir the sceptre and the crown. Rāma, refusing this sacrifice, restrains at first the grief he felt for the king's death, but when Bharata tells him about the funeral of the man who entrusted the care of his glory to the son of Kausalyā, the hero faints.

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap cix

When he returns to himself, the anxious Sītā is at his side with eyes bathed in tears; he tells her of the fresh grief that has befallen them; he draws his young wife within his arms, and they mingle their tears together. At the groans of the four brothers and of Sītā, the people and the army hasten to them, and Rāma touched by the solicitude of his brother's subjects, embraces them all, according to the expression of the poet, "with the affection of a father and the love of a mother."

The royal widows approach the hermitage at that moment. From afar Kausalyā perceives the humble cottage, the fruit of the inguda,[1] and the pressed sesamun laid by Rāma on the bank of the river; poor and pious offerings, which the exiled prince offers in his poverty, to the spirit of a departed father, once a king! That sight rends her heart.

The scene of the reunion is touching. Sītā especially is covered with caresses by Kausalyā, sad at the alteration of her features, for, transplanted to the calcined soil of the wild forest, the delicate flower of the gardens of Ayodhyā has lost her blooming colours

The strength of Rāma's mind is put to a severe test. Again Bharata begs him to ascend the throne, he begs him to wash off from the memory of Dasaratha, from Kaikeyī, and from himself, the stain of his exile, he begs him to sympathize in Kausalyā's affliction, and to fulfil his duties as a Kshattriya. Rāma remains immovable, he even bows to Fate, which has robbed him of his father, and endeavours to console his distracted family. He knows that life is only vanity; that the soul alone is blessed with immortality, and that the exercise of its most sublime faculties is summed up in one word. duty. "As it is no other reason than ripeness that puts fruit in danger of falling, so the danger of death only comes to men through reason of birth.

. . . . . .

"Death marches with them, death halts with them, and death will turn back with them, when they shall have gone a sufficiently long way and turned back

. . . . . .

"Why weepest thou for another? Weep, alas! for thyself;

[1] *Terminalia catappa*: Malabar almond

for whether thou reposest, or whether thou walkest, thy life consumes itself away incessantly.

. . . . . .

"Men rejoice when the star of day is risen upon the horizon; when it arrives at its setting, they again rejoice; and no one, neither at this hour nor at another, perceives that he has himself advanced towards the end of his life!

"Living beings take pleasure in seeing the new flower come to succeed the old at the succession of the seasons, but they are not aware that their own life runs at the same time towards its close, while passing, with these flowers, through these same successions

"Like a piece of floating wood meeting another piece carried along on the ocean, the two flotsams join and remain united for a short time, but soon separate, never to unite again; so, too, husbands and wives, children, friends, riches; accompany us in this life for the space of a moment, and disappear, for they cannot escape the hour which awaits their destruction

. . .

"Death is a caravan on the march, everything that breathes is placed on Death's route, and can say to him: 'Myself also, I shall follow to-morrow the steps of those whom thou art taking away to-day.'"[1]

Does not one feel here that philosophic and religious spirit, which in the Middle Ages inspired the *danse macabre*, that infernal round into which are irresistibly dragged the oppressor and the oppressed, the young and the aged; and which, in the seventeenth century, directed above earthly vanities the majestic flight of the eagle of Meaux?[2] It is the Aryan genius, retaining, in its diverse manifestations, one identical form.

Rāma continued with eloquent gravity:—

"The bird is created to fly and the stream to flow swiftly, but the soul is given to man to subject it to duty . ."

Dasaratha has been pure and just; he has, therefore, attained heaven, which he deserved. His conduct dictates to Rāma what he ought to do. The sacrifice of his dearest

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap cxii

[2] Bosseut, Bishop of Meaux his *Sermon on Death* and his *Funeral Orations* contain sentiments similar to those in the text here

affections to a sworn promise, such is the great example bequeathed to him by a father; he knows how it should inspire him.

Kaikeyī herself proposes that the crown of which she had robbed him should be offered to Rāma; the holy Brāhman Vasistha reminds him of the obedience that he owes to Kausalyā's commands, and the pity due to her tears; but neither Bharata's ardent supplications, Kaikeyī's repentance, Kausalyā's grief, the love of Ayodhyā's inhabitants, nor lastly, the holy voice of the Brāhman, can move him. He will fulfil, so he says, the "dear word of his good mother Kaikeyī", whom he prays Bharata to pardon. At the end of only fourteen years, will he resume his royal heritage, which he entrusts to Bharata meanwhile. Tearfully he watches his family depart; he hastens the hour of farewell; honour yet triumphs over affection.

After the departure of the court of Ayodhyā, Rāma perceives the sadness of the ascetics, his neighbours, who, though, they bring their hermitages nearer and nearer to his own, yet gaze on him at times with gloomy faces. Feeling anxious, he accosts the chief of the anchorites. Had the anger of the penitents been involuntarily roused by him, or by the impetuous Lakshmana, or even by the artless Sītā? One of the hermits reassures him. Neither he nor his brother nor his chaste companion, of so noble a mind, has failed in respect due to the Brāhmans; but since Rāma fixed his abode under the beautiful shades of the forest, security has been banished by the incursions of the Rākshasas, who appear to guess at the presence of their mortal enemy. The hermits are preparing to fly this accursed spot and prudently enjoin on Rāma to preserve himself and his family against the dangers which menace the woods. The exile, desirous, besides, of escaping the memories recalled by these groves, where perhaps for the last time he has seen his mothers, his brothers, and those who ought to be his subjects, follows this sage advice, and directs his way with Sītā and Lakshmana towards the hermitage of Atri.

The great Muni[1] receives with honour the two brothers,

[1] "Muni, a name given to a saintly personage pious and instructed, who participates more or less in the divine nature, or who is raised by penitence above human nature" Loiseleur-Deslongchamps, *Lois de Manu*.

and entrusts the pretty queen to his wife, whom he presents to Rāma in these words: "My friend, thou seest Anasūyā: it is she who lately bore for ten thousand years the weight of a terrible penance; she has for thee, young man without sin, the feelings of a mother.

"It is she, who, once when the earth was burnt up by drought for ten years without intermission, herself caused, notwithstanding the aridity, roots and fruit to spring forth, and the Ganges water to flow everywhere.

"It is she, too, who, travelling on missions for the Immortals, knew how to make one night equal to ten nights; she has for thee, young man without sin, the feelings of a mother.

"Let the princess approach this noble penitent, virtuous, perfect, without anger, and good towards every creature." [1]

Rāma urges Sītā to respond to such invaluable benevolence, and to strengthen herself in the practice of good deeds by virtuous intercourse with the great penitent Sītā bows with respect before the illustrious woman whose failing body with difficulty retains a strong and ever-growing soul

"I am the princess of Mithilā," she hastens to say, then making the anjali (that is to say, raising her hands above her forehead and joining them in the form of a cup),[2] she inquired with smiling grace after the health of Anasūyā.

What is the first word addressed to her by the anchorite after exchanging the forms of politeness?

"How happy art thou in the observance of duty!

"Glory to thee, illustrious Sītā, who, sacrificing honours, pleasure, the company of thy parents, hast followed for love thy husband into the woods!"

She repeats what the code of Manu has already taught us, about the respect due to a husband, whatever he may be, from the wife whom he has associated with his own life. The husband must always be like the supreme Deity, and heaven belongs to that wife who, like Sītā, devotes herself to, what might be termed in India, the conjugal cult.

[1] *Ayodhyākānda*, chap 11

[2] The first meaning of anjali is "a hollow of the hands", a "gesture made by holding the hands together before the forehead", then, any "cavity". This gesture is commonly used by Hindus as a mark of respect when they salute"

"Good woman, consecrate then thy life to such conduct; perform satisfactorily all the duties imposed by law on wives devoted to their husbands; follow firmly the way of thy conjugal obligations, and thou shalt afterwards obtain the glory that never fails to crown duty performed!"

Sītā already knew that duty. But how easy it had been to her! She could respect even a guilty husband; what must she then feel for one who had raised himself above human weakness; for one who to Kausalyā and to all the women in the gynæceum had always been a respectful son, a divine consoler! This duty had been dictated to Sītā by her mother, when before the altar she held Rāma's hand; it had been recalled to her by her stepmother, when she exiled herself in order to practise it continually, and now that the saint sanctifies it, it becomes still dearer to her. Anasūyā bends towards Sītā, and presses a motherly kiss upon her brow In a voice trembling with happiness and emotion, she announces to her that she wishes through her supernatural power, to bestow a precious gift upon her Sītā looks at her The women both smile; they have understood each other: Sītā, always beautiful, always decked with divine ornaments, will ever be the delight of her husband, and her brilliant tilaka, a diadem placed by the hand of love, shall sparkle for ever upon her radiant forehead. The two women sit down near each other, the young queen below the old anchorite In Anasūyā there is nothing more now than a loving grandmother, provoking and listening to the confidences of a dear child. She prays Sītā to tell her how Rāma became her husband; and the young wife, with timid, holy grace, tells her how the king of Videha, not wishing to bestow upon a man unworthy of her the virgin born of a furrow, made her the reward of valour. The anchorite inhales with delight the perfume of youth that flows from the gentle, artless discourse of Sītā, she draws her several times to her heart, and then, showing her the sunset, and the animated and peaceful scenes surrounding the hermitage at that hour, sends her back to the husband, who is waiting for her; but before leaving her, with a feeling of coquetry wholly feminine, she wishes to admire Sītā wearing the brilliant ornaments that she had offered her, and proudly smiles at the radiant beauty of her royal ward.

Great was the joy of Rāma and Lakshmana on beholding their companion's transfiguration.

On the morrow the exiles quitted the hermitage, and according to Atri's command, Rāma prepared to fight the Rākshasas. They were not long in finding themselves in the presence of one of these monsters of the forest; a Rākshasa rushed on them, and, with a terrible cry, seized Sītā, and rose in the air with the prey he had secured.

The young wife shudders in the monster's clutch. Rāma gazes at her with indescribable despair. Can he aim at the ravisher without the risk of killing the victim? With eyes bathed in tears he curses Kaikeyī. Lakshmana reproaches his brother for indulging in useless grief; tears will not save their loved one, but the blood of the ravisher; and he discharges an arrow at the Rākshasa who, wounded, raises against his enemy his invincible trident. Suddenly, Rāma, with his divine weapons, parries the stroke about to hit Lakshmana and wounds the monster mortally, and his failing arms let go their hold on Sītā. The expiring Rākshasa praises aloud the happiness of Kausalyā, mother of such a son, and blesses Rāma, in whom he hails a saviour.[1] His attempt had been only a feint, designed to excite the hero's anger. He was lately a Gandharva, whom the jealous Kuvera had punished for loving the Apsara, Rambhā, by condemning him to enter the body of a Rākshasa, and Rāma's arrows were to deliver him from this odious form.

"It is for this reason," he adds, "that I let Sītā fall on the bosom of the earth that she may be out of the way of the shaft, so that thy triumphant arrow might not destroy the life of thy dear Mithilan."[2] While the beautiful Gandharva rises joyously towards heaven, Rāma, taking in his arms the wife that he thought was lost, endeavours to calm her fears.

Urged afresh by the hermits, Rāma and Lakshmana prepare to repulse the black inhabitants of the forest. It is Sītā who arms the warriors and hands them quiver, bow, and sword. Nevertheless, a sinister presentiment agitates her.

[1] Viswāmitra had given these weapons to Rāma when, as a young man, he had killed the Rākshasī, Tadakā

[2] *Aranyakānda*, chap viii.

She feels anxious at seeing Rāma arrayed in the accoutrements of the Kshattriya, those dangerous weapons that tempt even the wise to bloodshed. May he not forget the pacific virtues of the anchorite in the struggles he is about to engage! She begs him to follow unswervingly the path of duty, to join in his new position mercy to justice, gentleness to valour. Let him defend himself, but never provoke another! She reproaches herself for giving such counsels to the man so pre-eminently just and good; but Rāma receives with affectionate condescension the advice of his young wife.

"Queen, O thou to whom duty is so well known, these good words, spoken lovingly from thy mouth, surpass even the greatness of thy race, noble daughter of king Janaka.

"Why should I repeat, charming woman, what was said by thee?

"The sword is in the hands of the Kshattriya that he may prevent oppression from forcing the cry of anguish from the oppressed.

"Is not this what thou hast said?

"Well, Sītā, these anchorites are unhappy in the forest of Dànkaka!"[1]

He will, then, defend them, for they have supplicated his protection. He would sacrifice to his mission Sītā, Lakshmana, even his life, but he is happy at Sītā's discourse:

"Yes, these words that thou hast said to me, inspired by love and tenderness, it is with pleasure that I have heard them, dear Videhan: for to him who is not loved, counsel is not given."

Ten years elapse, during which the exiles wander from hermitage to hermitage.

Then the great anchorite Agastya warmly welcomes them. The austere old man inquires, with truly paternal interest, after Sītā's health, and exhorts Rāma to render easy to this faithful wife the dangerous sojourn that she shares with him. The kindly attention paid by Agastya to the princess is the more precious because the Brāhman has an opinion but little favourable of women in general.

"Son of Raghu, does not fatigue overwhelm thy dear Videhan?"

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap xiv

In fact, Sītā has but a delicate frame, and never before has she left a life of ease.

"Now that, moved by love for her husband, she has come to these forests beset with perils on every hand, act in such a way, Rāma, that thy faithful Videhan finds some ease in a life in the woods

"In exiling herself into the depths of the forest for thy sake, she is doing something very hard to do; for weakness and fear always form part of a woman's nature.

"To remain with her husband as long as fortune favours him, to forsake him in misfortune, that is often the nature and character of women. They imitate in their conduct the zigzags of lightning, the sharp point of arrows, the lightness of flame and of wind

"But the chaste spouse of thy greatness is exempt from these faults she only deserves praise, she is like Arundhatī,[1] near to the gods, a model to present before women Assuredly these woods receive to-day a noble adornment in thy sojourn here in my hermitage with the Sumitride [2] and this virtuous Mithilan" [3]

Agastya points out to Rāma a retreat in a picturesque spot, a cool and shady asylum well fitted to please the young wife who, protected by her husband, shall there taste of pure joy Touching solicitude in a man of such a character! Continuing their journey, the travellers meet Jatāyu, king of the vultures, Dasaratha's old friend, who offers himself to Rāma to watch over Sītā when her two protectors are absent.

In the delightful hermitage situated on the banks of the Godāvarī, happy hours are again spent by the exiles Breathing the vivifying air of the woods, that redoubles the feeling of life, they submit to the beneficent influence of nature.

It is winter; snow spreads its swansdown carpet over the hills, softly lighted up by a pale glow Nature, enveloped in its shroud, is beautiful even in death.

Rāma and his brother are talking together. Lakshmana

[1] Arundhatī, one of the Pleiades, wife of Vasishta, one of the seven Rishis, who compose the constellation of the Great Bear She is the type of conjugal fidelity, the only one of the wives of the seven Rishis who scorned the homage of Agni

[2] Lakshmana is thus designated by his mother's name Sumitrā

[3] *Aranyakānda*, chap xix

thinks of Bharata, who far away, in the very midst of royalty, leads the life of an ascetic, undergoes severe mortifications, and plunges into the icy waters of Sarayū. Then he adds :—

"Man imitates not the example given him by his father, but the model that he finds in his mother," says an adage repeated from mouth to mouth in the universe ; the manner of life led by Bharata is the reverse of the proverb. "How, king of the children of Manu, how can Kaikeyī, our mother, she who has for a son the virtuous Bharata, she who had for her husband Dasaratha, how can she be what she is ?" [1]

But Rāma, always magnanimous, reproves the ardent young man for his just but scarcely charitable judgment : "Thou oughtest not before me, my friend, to cast blame on the mother who holds the middle place between our own ; speak only here of Bharata, the noble chief of the Ikshwākides."

The man who had such stern self-control over himself must be invincible in battle. It was about to commence, that terrible struggle on which rests the plot of the epic poem, and which was to bring together the three races who had divided the globe between them. And a woman would be the cause of it all !

Jatāyu had just taken leave of the exiled family. Rāma was near Sītā under the leafy roof The sister of Rāvana the Rākshasa, or more properly speaking, the negro king of Lankā, was wandering in the woods She sees Rāma and is agitated. The Aryan hero, with his pure profile, his elegant and proud carriage, strikes with admiration the negress with misshapen features and rough exterior. She gazes upon Sītā, the aristocratic beauty of the young queen would have daunted her. if her magic power had not permitted her to assume an equally attractive form.

Smilingly she approaches the three anchorites, and gently questions Rāma The prince tells her in a few words the events that have brought him to the forest, and asks her in his turn who she is, and how it is she wanders alone and without fear in the formidable Dankaka forest ?

The siren forgot her part · "Listen then, with thy brother," she said, "to the words I am about to say. I am called Sūrpanakhā, I am a Rākshasī, at my will I assume any form ; and if I walk alone in the midst of the woods, Rāma, it is

[1] *Aranyakhānda*, chap. xxii.

because I strike terror into every creature. The holy tîrthas and the altars lie in ruins there, destroyed by me.

" For brothers I have the king of the Rākshasas himself, named Rāvana; Vibhīshana, the soul of justice, who has repudiated the customs of the Rākshasas;[1] Kumbhakarna, of prolonged sleep and immense strength; and two Rākshasas famous for courage and vigour, Khara and Dūshana."[2]

It was well for a woman of black blood to maintain her dignity by menace, terror, or even by brutal force; but these means cannot succeed with a man in whom moral sense alone is dominant. So, when the Rākshasī proposed to Rāma to become his wife, Rāma rallied her jestingly, " Would she like to be his second wife, and of an inferior rank? Let her offer her hand to him who is not bound by a first marriage; to Lakshmana, for example."

This latter declined the honour in his turn. " Would Rāvana's sister care to marry the servant of Rāma? Let her turn back to the eldest son of Dasaratha. Besides, what is this Sītā compared with her? "

The savage daughter of the forests blindly takes the mocking words of the two princes as if seriously meant, and rushes towards the woman who is her only obstacle.

" Then with eyes like two lighted firebrands, she darts upon the Videhan, who was gazing at her with soft eyes like those of the fawn of the gazelle, one may have said it was a great meteor of fire hurling itself against the beautiful star, Rohini "[3]

But Rāma stops her, and angrily addresses his brother: " Son of Sumitrā, one must never jest with those of fierce and vicious natures, see, my dear friend, how narrowly it is that my dear Videhan has escaped death."[4]

[1] Vibhīshana is described by his sister Sūrpanakhā as having forsaken the practices of the Rākshasas Dr Muir thinks that he may represent a southern tribe which had been converted to Brāhmanism or had adopted Brāhmanical uses (*Indian epic poetry* being the substance of lectures recently given at Oxford, with an analysis of the Rāmāyana and of the leading story of the Mahābhārata By Monier Williams, 1863)

[2] *Aranyakānda*, chap xxiii

[3] *Aranyakānda*, chap xxiv Rohini is one of the spouses of Soma, the god of the Moon ' It is," says M Langlois, " the fourth lunar asterism, containing five stars of the Bull " (Harivansa)

[4] *Aranyakānda*, chap xxiv

He orders him to repel the monster, and Lakshmana, with an energy redoubled at the danger incurred by his beloved sister, draws his sword and mutilates the Rākshasī's face. Bleeding, the latter flies through the woods, which echo her cries of pain and rage. She flies to her brother, Khara, and arriving before him, sinks exhausted to the ground. Khara, furious at seeing his sister thus frightfully disfigured, presses her to tell him his name who has thus treated her. Were he a god, he shall not escape his anger.

In a faltering voice and with tears, Sūrpanakhā gives him a false account of the scene that had passed between the anchorites and herself. She had wished, she says, to make the two men and their companion her prey, and she takes good care not to confess by what seductions she had endeavoured to beset Rāma.

"Drawn into combat, notwithstanding my cries, notwithstanding my resistance, see what an outrage they have done on me! . and it is thou who art my protector! But soon, thanks to thee, demon of the night, I shall drink their, and also that woman's, frothing blood, poured upon the field of battle."[1] And Khara, thirsting also after blood, commands fourteen Rākshasas to punish the offenders. The demons rush forward and Sūrpanakhā guides them.

Rāma sees the enemy approaching, he confides his wife to Lakshmana, and advances towards the Rākshasas. He meets their attack with vigorous defence: soon the black foes bite the dust, and their princess, trembling with terror, takes refuge again with her brother

Khara is astonished. How is it that she who is avenged returns weak and groaning? "Returnest thou like a woman without one to defend her, when thou hast still my arm to defend thee? Rise, illustrious dame."

The negress informs him of the result of the expedition. She graphically describes to him the sad spectacle of the immortal Rākshasas; she points out to him the gloomy future that awaits the people of the black race, death hovering over their heads. By a well-calculated expression of scorn, she appears to doubt that Khara had sufficient strength and courage to dare to fight against enemies too formidable

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap xxv

for him; she excites him to vengeance with biting words, that pierce him like a goad :—

"Avenge me; otherwise, I, who speak to thee, will fling away my life before thy eyes, shameless coward, if my enemy be not immolated by thy hand, this very day. To be sure! all here and in Lankā, the magnanimous Rāvana, the powerful king of the Rākshasas, consider thee the proudest hero of the Rākshasa armies!

"What has become of thy ardour, thy intelligence, thy spirit, thy constancy, thy courage, thy joy in fighting, thy impetuosity against enemies, thy exalted and widespread renown? Where then is all this gone?"

And when Kara, boiling with fury, swears to her that soon she shall drink the blood of the exiles, "Glory to thee!" she exclaims, "glory to thee, hero! to thee, the lord of the Rākshasas, in whose breast has sprung up the brave and noble desire of immolating thy enemies in combat!

"Glory to thee, whose resolute soul is fixed upon the task of killing our enemies I recognize in thee the equal of Rāvana for courage and vigour!"

She now praises him for the security enjoyed by the Rākshasas ever since he has held the feudal lordship of Janasthāna. Who would now dare to fight against him?

Charmed with his sister's flattering words, the black sovereign ordered the army to prepare for the march, and himself mounting his war-chariot, gave the word to advance Notwithstanding sinister forebodings that troubled him, his firmness did not desert him; he believed himself strong enough to make even death turn back before him.

Meanwhile, the choristers of the gods, the Gandharvas, the Siddhas, the Apsaras, were announcing the triumph of Rāma and the death of Khara. Lakshmana, intoxicated with the desire to fight, is reminded by Rāma that his part is to defend his timid sister-in-law. Lakshmana makes her enter a cavern, and stands beside her, bow in hand.

Rāma is in presence of the enemy. What a spectacle! On one side fourteen thousand men with black skins and athletic forms; on the other, one man of the white race, a single man, to those belonged physical strength; to this *one*, the moral force which conquers that strength. The

Immortals themselves are anxious; they tremble for the *man* but they hope for the *god*.

Rāma, a smile upon his lips, but fire in his eyes, calmly receives the impetuous attack of the negroes. Strong in his divine weapons, he crushes the great army and mortally wounds Khara and Dūshana.

There is joy in the heavens. Brahma contemplates with admiration the hero of whom the divine choirs are singing. Destiny is being fulfilled: in drawing Rāma to the Dandaka forest, the Brāhmans knew that they were calling thither the exterminator of their cruel enemies. Their object is gained.

When Rāma re-entered his hut Sītā, throwing herself into the hero's arms, praised him for having been faithful to his pledged word in defending the cause of the oppressed: "Glory to thee, my noble husband!"[1] she said to him.

These days of happiness and glory were to have a sad morrow.

Sūrpanakhā repairs to the court of Lankā; she enters the presence of her brother Rāvana—that Rāvana whom Brahma lately had sheltered from the anger of the gods, and for whose punishment Vishnu is now incarnate upon earth. The princess upbraids him. Their two brothers are dead, and he ignores it! An army of Rākshasas is destroyed, and he is plunged in dissipation! Let him tremble, for, very soon, hurled from his throne, he will be an object only of scorn!

Rāvana, astonished, questions his sister, who informs him of the events of which the Janasthāna has been the theatre. She explains the cause, and shudders again at the memory of the torture inflicted upon her by Lakshmana, torture that might have been her death, if Rāma had not interposed with the words: "It is a woman!" Here, she speaks of Sītā with admiration, it is a voluptuous king whom she addresses, and the desire to win a beautiful wife will perhaps do what the desire to avenge the deed might not. And Rāvana, drunk with the hope awakened in his heart by the cunning negress, mounts his magic chariot.

Crossing the ocean, he visits Marīcha, the son of the Rākshasī Tārakā, who was the first victim sacrificed by

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap. xxxv.

Rāma to the sacred cause which, when a youth, he had begun to defend

This is the auxiliary whose alliance Rāvana wishes to secure. Let him assume, he asks, the form of a beautiful gazelle frolicking before the hermitage of the exiles. Sītā will desire the possession of the graceful animal, Rāma will pursue it, and in the absence of her two defenders the daughter of the Āryas will be at the mercy of the negro king, who will carry her off. The rape of Sītā will have two precious results: the avenging of Sūrpanakhā, and the moral weakening of the hero who has sworn the ruin of the Rākshasas. But Marīcha, who has embraced the ascetic life, refuses to be made an accomplice in the wicked action of Rāvana. He feels that the seizure of Sītā will be the ruin of the black tribes. And how could an impure king of unbridled passions succeed in ravishing a happy wife when defended by a lion-hearted spouse?

Marīcha urges Rāvana to consult his ministers and his virtuous brother Vibhīshana on this subject. "Consult also," he says, "Trijatā, the female anchorite, exempt from all fault, arrived at perfection, and rich in her great penitence; thou wilt receive from her, O king, the wisest council"

Has not Marīcha himself been twice already a victim of Rāma's bravery; and is it not the shame of his defeats that has driven him to leave his beloved wives and his princely way of life?

Rāvana, in his blindness, retorts wrathfully to the sage advice of the recluse He had asked him, not for useless counsel but for active assistance. Why fear Rāma? In the eyes of the black king, who understood no kind of courage but physical courage, who was a slave to his appetites, what did Rāma matter to him? Rāma, the voluntary victim of honour, that is to say, of an idea; that Kshattriya, who at the command of a woman, had refused to ascend the steps of a throne, to which he was summoned by birthright as the eldest, and by the voice of a people, and who had, instead, without a murmur taken the sad road to a miserable exile!

Besides, Rāvana knew, if necessary, how to obtain by violence what Marīcha would refuse to persuasion only; and the latter, painfully affected, finally yielded; not to threats

that he despised, but to the affection that he had vowed to his old companion-in-arms.

Shortly afterwards, two beings of strange appearance entered the forest of Dandaka, which of late Sītā had much dreaded to live in.

The exiles are together; they admire the graceful bounds of a fairy-like gazelle, wandering hear the hermitage. On its golden coat of hair dazzling lotuses blossom and emeralds and lapis lazuli sparkle, and on its forehead grow four golden horns incrusted with pearls.

Sītā gazes longingly at the marvellous animal. What a beautiful carpet that silky skin would make with its dazzling points of reflected light! With what happiness would the young wife lie down upon it! Rāma, happy at the artless joy of his gentle companion, entrusts Sītā to Lakshmana, and is about to rush in pursuit of the gazelle, of which the spoil, serving as a seat to the exiled queen, will remind her of the throne of Ayodhyā, when Lakshmana, anxious and pre-occupied, holds him back. A golden gazelle does not exist in nature, magic only can create it, and he has heard it said that the Rākshasa Marīcha assumes at times that seductive form.

But Sītā interrupts this prudent speech, and with her beautiful open-hearted smile and winning voice, says to Rāma: "My noble husband, it has charmed my heart! bring to me, warrior of the long arms, this charming gazelle; it will serve to amuse us here." [1]

Alive or dead, let the fairy animal be brought to her, and after being an ornament to their hut, it will one day, when the exile is over, be the joy of the royal gynæceum.

For a fanciful fear, how can he resist the satisfaction of giving an innocent pleasure to the young and loved wife, who has exchanged all the pleasures of the world for the miseries of exile! Even Lakshmana's suspicions strengthen Rāma in his resolution. If the gazelle really hides a demon, what more powerful reason for killing it! Enjoining therefore Lakshmana for the last time not to leave Sītā, Rāma quickly leaves them . . .

In a chase, painted by the author in the most fantastic



[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap. I

colours, the prince wanders far away . . . He thinks he has reached the gazelle, when she eludes him . . . He sees her again . . . she disappears . . . Once again he sees her, pursues her, loses all traces of her, and recovers them again . . . His patience exhausted, he shoots at the elusive animal an arrow, the work of Brahma himself. Mortally wounded, Marīcha falls; but he wills that even his death should be one more service rendered to Rāvana . . Concentrating in a final effort the forces that are on the point of forsaking him, he imitates Rāma's voice and exclaims: "Ah, Lakshmana, save me!"[1]

Astonished, Rāma approaches . . Instead of the charming gazelle, at his feet lies the corpse of a Rākshasa!

A sombre foreboding agitates him. What mean that cry of anguish and that sinister transformation? He thinks of Sītā and, tortured by keen anguish, he turns his steps towards the hermitage, now far distant.

Meanwhile, a violent scene was troubling the hitherto peaceful asylum of the exiles Sītā had heard the cry of distress perfidiously uttered by Marīcha, she had recognized in it the voice of her beloved! Distracted, she presses Lakshmana to fly to the succour of Rāma; but the prince, faithful to the charge that his brother had confided to him, refuses to leave the young woman He answers for the hero's life; it is not the invincible Rāma who had like a coward called for help; and Lakshmana endeavours good-naturedly to reassure Sītā

This unexpected resistance exasperates the princess. Her brother-in-law, then, wishes that she may have to reproach herself with the death of her husband! Breaking forth into keen upbraidings, and misjudging the noble character of the young man, she even throws a doubt on the sincerity of his pure devotion to her, and attributes it to odious motives Doubtless, when under the veil of fidelity he accompanied the exiled couple to the forest, he already foresaw the misfortune which might perhaps permit him to marry his sister-in-law! Sītā swears to love her husband living or dead, and her voice dies in a flood of tears.

We have seen that an elder brother's wife ought to be

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap I

respected like a mother. Therefore Lakshmana restrained himself at first. He bowed before the woman for whom his heart yearned with brotherly love, but the storm was gathering in his breast, and soon burst forth. "I cannot answer you back; your position in my eyes is as high as that of a god; and, Mithilan, it is not an extraordinary thing to find an unjust word in the mouths of women.

This is the character of woman, such as it is seen to be in the world: she is inconstant, she likes not the restraint of duty, she is glad to sow division amongst brothers.

"Listen to me, inhabitants of the woods, you who are witnesses; when I spoke to her in language becoming and dictated by sound reason, she only gave me back in return hard and cruel words.

"Shame to thee! perish then if thou willest, thou, in whom thy bad woman's nature inspires such suspicions regarding me, even when I am obeying the order of my august brother." [1]

Pain and indignation have carried the young prince too far. Scarcely had he uttered this cruel satire on Sītā's sex, scarcely had he confounded with vulgar women the heroic woman who had always been a devoted wife and loving sister, than he repented of his vehemence. The despair of Sītā was a sufficient excuse in his eyes for a moment of forgetfulness. He has pardoned the insult, though his heart still bleeds from the wound He stands near her with an affectionate mien, and gently resumes:—

"Well! I go where the Kakutsthide is; [2] may happiness still be near thee, woman of the charming face! May all the divinities of these woods protect thee, lady of the large eyes! For the forebodings that present themselves to my eyes inspire only terror. May I on my return see thee again with Rāma!"

Sītā sobbed and beat her chest; she protested her fidelity to the husband whom she vowed not to survive. The young prince endeavoured to calm and console her. She did not listen to him. At last Lakshmana decides to disobey Rāma;

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap. li.

[2] From the name of Dasaratha, his father, from Ikshwāku, Kakutstha, Raghu, his ancestor, Rāma is often called Dasarathide, Ikshwākide, Kakutsthide, Raghuide.

he salutes Sītā and goes, not before casting upon her a last and eloquent look.

Rāvana seized the opportunity.

In the garb of a mendicant Brāhman, the Rākshasa approaches, reciting Vedic prayers; but, as he advances, horror seems to chill all nature. He accosts the desolate widow, and his disguise lessens the apprehension inspired by his honeyed words in the young woman:—

"Nymph of the sweet smile, of the sweet face, and sweet look, nymph charming and timid, who shinest in this forest like a flowering grove, who art thou in this golden attire resembling the flower-bud of spring? Modesty, glory, fortune, purity, grace, which art then of these celestial virtues?"[1]

In a long discourse Rāvana extols the beauty of the young woman, is astonished that the wild forest of Dandaka is inhabited by her who ought to have the Nandana, the grove of Indra for her abode. Sītā feels ill at ease, nevertheless the dress of the false priest reassures her. While the latter partakes of the collation that she has prepared for him, she relates the events that have brought her into the woods with her husband and her brother-in-law. Thanks to her husband, she says, the forest is now less dangerous, and the simple Sītā assures the hermit that he can live there without fear. She desires to be told the name of the guest whom she is receiving, and answers beforehand for the pleasure with which Rāma on his return will entertain the holy visitor.

Then said the demon to her: Listen who I am, what blood is in my veins; and when thou shalt know it, forget not to render me the homage that is due. It is to come here to see thee that I have borrowed this lucky disguise, I, by whom men and Immortals, and even the king of the Immortals have been put to flight. I am he who is called Rāvana, the curse of all the worlds .[2]

Proposing to Sītā to take her for his wife, he declares that she shall be the first of the royal spouses, he describes to her the attractions of Lankā that will quickly make her forget the privations of life in the forest. Addressing himself to

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap lii (Passage translated by L. Eichhoff, *Poésie héroïque des Indiens*)

[2] Ibid, chap liii

her delicacy of mind, he endeavours, by a display of his taste for literature and culture, to give himself an additional title to her esteem.

What effect was this odious proposal to produce on a woman of India; that is to say, on the slave born of conjugal devotion? Trembling with wrath, Rāma's spouse answers him in proud, forceful words: "I shall be faithful to my husband, Rāma, who resembles Mahendra,[1] whom no power can move any more than a great mountain, or agitate any more than the vast ocean!

"I shall be faithful to Rāma, this heroic son of a king, of boundless strength, of widespread glory, who has conquered the organs of sense, and whose face resembles the full disk of the star of night! I shall be faithful to the valiant Rāma, like a lioness to her lion "

She laughs at the power of the swarthy sovereign. What is he like, compared to her husband? She scorns the power of the Rākshasa, for that power will not serve him to carry away Sītā when defended by Rāma.

"One might sooner see thee ravish Sachī[2] from the god who wields the thunder, the fiery flame from a burning brazier, Umā[3] herself from Siva, the master of the world, than one might see thee, Rāvana, carry me away from my noble Raghuide!"

While she speaks thus, she trembles with anger, but with terror too . . . Rāvana perceives this and vaunts afresh his rank, his strength his dreadful power. Let her leave Rāma, who is but a man, to follow Rāvana, the conqueror of the gods She must obey him, for if needs be she would learn what is the price of a longer resistance.

Sītā threatens him in her turn The death of Rāvana would be the expiation of his crime . . Suddenly the hermit's figure disappears, and instead there stands a giant with ten heads, dressed in a red tunic, his eyes suffused with blood, darting upon her his sinister looks . . . Well, he, the dreaded potentate, he will be the slave of his frail captive!

Neither menacing nor seductive words shake Sītā's faithfulness. Exasperated, Rāvana seizes her and soars up into the air

[1] Great Indra.

[2] Sachī or Indrānī, spouse of Indra.

[3] Another name for Pārvatī, spouse of Siva.

with his prey. In despair the young wife calls upon the husband, who for love of her has gone into the forest; she calls upon the brother, whom but lately she had insulted: "Help me, dear husband! . . . Wherefore, hero, dost thou not defend me? . . . Help me, Lakshmana!" [1]

Rāvana's magic chariot waits for him; he mounts and places his captive in it. "Help me, my husband!" she cries again. "But," adds the poet, "her husband was wandering far away in the woods and could not hear her." The chariot cuts rapidly through the air. "Ah, Lakshmana, warrior of the long arms, thou who didst arouse so much love in the heart of thy eldest brother, thou dost not know that I am carried away by this cruel demon! Or else, scourge of his enemies, hast thou no longer that strength that once could conquer the enemies of Rāma?

"Hero of the vigorous arm, of wide renown, faithful to duty, attached to truth, seest thou not that a Rākshasa carries me, defenceless, away!"

She thinks of Kaikeyī, of the inhuman stepmother, the source of all their misery. Then she gazes, her eyes bathed in tears, on the beautiful spots—where, perhaps for the last time, she had as a wife loved and devoted herself; she greets them with a last look, and takes them as witnesses of her misfortune and of her innocence, and calls upon all nature to succour her.

"Adieu, Janasthāna. I salute you, flowering trees! Hasten to tell my husband: 'Rāvana carries Sītā away!'

"Adieu, mountains with the pointed tops! Adieu, hill and stream! Hasten to tell my husband: 'Rāvana carries Sītā away!'

"Adieu, Godāvarī river, whose echoes repeat the songs of cranes and swans! Hasten to tell my husband: 'Rāvana carries Sītā away!'

"I address my adorations to you, divinities who inhabit this forest of diverse trees! Hasten to tell my husband: 'Sītā was carried away!' You also, whatever may be your species, you animals having these great woods for your homes, I call upon you to succour me! All of you, whatever you may be, who inhabit this vast forest, flocks of small birds and

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap. lv.

beasts with mighty limbs and long teeth, lend me your succour!

"In the absence of my husband and of the sage, Lakshmana, I was torn away from here by the demon Rāvana; I desire that it should be told Rāma! Tell him that this Rākshasa carries me away against my will, I, the cherished wife of Rāma and the spouse that he loves more than his life!"

And hope creeps into her torn heart.

"On hearing this news, 'Sītā is carried away!' this hero with the great soul and the strong arm, exerting all his courage, will bring me back, if need be, even from the regions where Yama reigns!"

Already a defender presents himself in Jatāyu, the king of the vultures, who had but shortly left the exiles. He reproaches Rāvana for his cowardly, guilty action:—

"It belongs especially to kings," he says, "to protect the wives of others.

. . . . . .

"A hero will never commit an action that deserves censure; he will always defend the wife of another like his own; think well over this!"[1]

Jatāyu is old and his adversary is young; but in order to defend the cause of a woman in peril, the king of the vultures will be able to regain his former vigour.

A struggle ensues, a struggle threatening to be fatal to Rāvana, but in which, however, Jatāyu succumbs, exhausted. Sītā, seizing her dying protector in her arms, and weeping, presses him to her heart: "Thou hast shown," she says to him, "that thou art the friend of the magnanimous scion of the ancient Raghu, the Indra of men, and it is for my sake, Indra of birds, that such a death was, alas! reserved for thee.

"Yes, thou art my protector here instead of the magnanimous Raghuide, the king of men! Yes, I have found in thee here the king Dasaratha or the king of Mithilā, my father."[2]

Another thought, the most heart-rending of all, adds to her suffering. "There, lying inanimate upon the ground, is he who might have told to Rāma that I yet live, and that, though fallen into such a misfortune, I am still virtuous; ah! this hour will be also the hour of my death!" Rāvana

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap lvi.
[2] Ibid., chap lviii.

runs to her, but the poor woman, feeling herself on the ground once more, thinks that deliverance is nearer; she clasps the trees convulsively, beseeching them as if they could hear her, saying: "Save me! save me!"

The monster, darting upon her, seizes her by the hair. At such an act of violence, the face of nature is overcast, the sky is darkened, and Brahma, from the midst of his eternal rest, lets fall these words: "The crime is consummated."

The golden bracelets slip off the feet and hands of the princess; her necklet of white pearls is unstrung, the pearls marking her passage; and nature, weeping for the young wife, surrounds her with soft consoling murmurs Even wild beasts follow Sītā as if to defend her.

"Justice is no more! Whence now will truth come? Rectitude is no more; goodness is no more!" Such were the words that along Sītā's passage respond to her groans, mingled with keen reproaches to her captor. She treats him as a coward, who has contrived to send away her protectors, that he may surprise her in her loneliness

Upon the summit of the mountain, Rishyamūka, were at that moment five of those men of the yellow race who are designated in the epic poem under the name of monkeys or Vānaras, men of the woods. Sītā, with an inspiration sudden as the lightning, throws to them her remaining jewels, and allows her upper garments to float down to them: "If only they were to tell of this act to Rāma!"[1]

The spirits of the air, the Chāranas, cry to the ravisher: "What thou doest, Dasagrīva,[2] is thy death warrant." The ocean itself roars furiously as Rāvana crosses it; and in the midst of gloomy presages, Rāvana re-enters Lankā.

Intoxicated with joy, he commands that his beautiful captive should be honourably treated. An insult offered to the queen will be the death warrant of the offender. He draws the downcast young woman along the palace halls and the groves in the garden; he wishes to make her admire all its marvels. Useless trouble! The thoughts of his prisoner revert to the wild tracts where at that moment her Rāma lives and suffers

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap lx
[2] One who has ten necks.

Rāvana recounts the number of his subjects, the strength of his army, the wealth of his treasure, the number of his wives. And he, the powerful king, considers Sītā as his queen. Let her rule over *him*! Besides, how could Rāma seek for her in an inaccessible island? Let her completely abandon herself to the delights of her new position; soon will the water of coronation be poured upon her beautiful forehead. Rāvana even dares to make her see in the pleasures of Lankā the reward for the ascetic life she had led in the depth of the woods

At words like these, which clashed with all the instincts of her delicate nature, Sītā grows pale. Rāvana sees it, and, in humble attitude, tries to reassure her. But proud and inexorable, the chaste being crushes with scorn the hopes of the impure prowler of the night. Vengeance, she believes, is at hand; Rāma weeps now; but the blood of the ravisher will soon pay for the husband's tears. The destruction of his people will soon expiate the despot's crime. At last, the virtue of the young queen, unveiling itself in all its serene majesty, draws from her some of those expressions which, under other skies, faith was to inspire in the martyrs of a new religion; expression of such an exalted character that they seem the cry of the soul itself:—

"Torture if thou willest, nay, devour this material body, so devoid of all feeling! Discharge thy anger upon it, for I am in thy power! I defend neither my body, nor even my life, Rāvana; but I cannot lay down my honour." [1]

And she enfolds herself in scornful silence.

And this creature who but lately reserved the supreme punishment for whoever should dare to proffer even a disagreeable word to the young queen, this same creature now sends for a troop of frightful Rākshasīs and orders them to take Sītā to a grove of asokas, to keep watch over her there, and to use alternately fearful threats and gentle words until she should consent to allow herself to be crowned queen of Lankā.

Surrounded by a guard of horrible black women, the daughter of the Aryas suffers cruelly. In the midst of the flowering scented grove where she is detained, she tries to live in thought with Rāma and Lakshmana, her tenderly loved

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap. lxii.

brother, but far from calming her grief, this memory only doubles its bitterness.

The gods debate in their councils on the great questions which the rape of Sītā would raise on earth. Brahma rejoices in an event which will bring ruin on the Rākshasas. But how can the prisoner be informed that her husband will know of the place of her captivity? How can she be prevented from starving herself to death? Brahma sends Indra with clarified butter, the food of the Immortals, for the faithful wife. Sleep, personified, accompanies the divine messenger, and overpowers Sītā's guard of women.

Indra appears to the captive. "I am the king of the gods; may happiness descend upon thee!" he says to her, "cast thy glance upon me, woman of the open-hearted smile."[1] He announces to her that her husband lives, that, protected by him, Rāma will deliver her, and will conduct her back triumphantly in Rāvana's own chariot, over the corpses of the Rākshasas and of their sovereign. Therefore, let her quench her thirst in the cup of immortality.

But Sītā doubts. "How can I know," she asks, "that it is really Indra, the divine husband of Sachī, whom I see present here before my eyes?"

"If thou art truly the king of the Immortals, show me without delay those signs by which a god is recognized, and which I have heard many times discussed in the presence of my spiritual preceptor!"

And Indra, granting her request, looks at her with the eye that never closes, and supports himself without touching the ground with his feet!

It was the first moment of happiness the young woman had enjoyed since her capture. Assured of the well-being of those she loved, of the protection granted them by heaven, she abandons herself to an ineffable burst of joy, and exclaims in her exaltation: "This immortal and best of milk, given by thee, I drink it, as thou invitest me to do, to the increase of the family of the Raghuides!" And seizing the cup, she adds in unutterable tones: "Long life to my husband of powerful might, and to his brother!"

Meanwhile, what is passing in the deserted hermitage of the Dandaka forest?

[1] *Aranyakânda*, chap. lxiii

We have seen Rāma tossed by gloomy forebodings, returning in haste towards his hut. As he goes, sinister auguries terrify him, and he guesses what must have happened in his absence. He thinks he sees Sītā forsaken, perhaps killed by the Rākshasas. At this moment Lakshmana appears before him and is met with an angry look. Why has he left Sītā?

Rāma asks him in his anguish where is the faithful companion of the poor exile, where is the friend, separated from whom he could not live for an hour, and without whom he would care neither for the lordship of the earth nor for immortality itself. Ah! perhaps Kaikeyī will be satisfied now; perhaps those whom she has banished will never again see Ayodhyā, for Rāma will not survive his beloved one. Ah! what ineffable happiness would he feel if, on re-entering the nest of verdure, the shelter lately of three happy people, Sītā were to receive him with her sweet smile "It will be new life for me! . ." he says. How much she must be suffering, even no ., frightened by Marīcha's cry! How wrong of Lakshmana to forsake her!

Filled with grief, wrung with inexpressible anguish, Rāma arrives at the hermitage He rushes forward . . .

The hermitage is empty! .

Lakshmana, overwhelmed with grief, repeats to his brother the cruel words Sītā had spoken to him, words which obliged him to seek for the husband she believed to be in danger. Rāma does not admit the excuse. The language of an angry woman, ought it to have led Lakshmana to fail in his commission? It was a breach of duty.

All hope is not yet lost, however. Perhaps she is playfully hiding behind the trees, and wants to prove her husband's love, perhaps she is amused at the grief of those who weep for her . . But what mean these golden spangles, these bloody drops sprinkled all over the ground? Yes, Sītā has been killed, and this is the blood of the monsters, as they fought over their tender prey . And this great bow, this armour of gold and precious stones, this parasol wreathed with flowers, this broken sceptre, these strange animals, lying dead, this shattered war-chariot, these disks, these arrows and darts, how did they come here? . . .[1]

[1] These were the relics of the struggle between Rāvana and Jatāyu.

Where, then, is she whom Rāma calls his queen? The two brothers go through the forest, searching every recess, however slight, anxiously listening to every murmur, however low . . .

Nothing; nothing but the rustling of the wind amongst the leaves; the warbling of birds pouring forth their love-songs; the roaring of wild beasts rousing the echoes of the vast solitudes.

Losing all self-control, Rāma sinks down. Stretched upon the ground, he confesses himself conquered, and gives vent to bitter complaints. "As one bewails the loss of his entire fortune, the ambrosial feasts where he is no longer a guest, the paradise itself from which he has fallen, so do I regret my noble Janakide . " After many alternations of hope and despair Rāma at last perceives upon the ground a wreath of flowers which he had seen Sītā weave, and distinguishes at a little distance from this sad relic the impression of a Rākshasa's foot Fury is now added to his grief, and Rāma expresses his sufferings with savage energy. His is no longer the controlled grief of the sage, but it is the roaring of a wild beast!

Of what avail has been his faithfulness to duty? What duty can it be that meets with such a reward? Surely, that strength of soul has been misunderstood, by which he had raised himself above his misfortune!

They had taken his heroism for the cowardice of one impotent in fight! Truce to such superhuman placidity! Enough of forbearance! If his companion be not restored to him the whole world shall crumble away, and the gods themselves shall perish! And the Kshattriya brandishes his invincible bow.

At that burst of anger, that bitter desire to shed blood, that boundless grief, Lakshmana is struck with consternation. Is this really Rāma, the hero, master of himself, who forgives offences and smiles at misfortune?

It is Lakshmana who restores in him once more the feelings of justice, uprightness, and humanity, of which up to that fatal hour had Rāma ever given proof Why, in order to reach one or two who are guilty, should millions of the innocent be punished? Let Rāma search with his brother for the companion they have lost, and once the traces of the victim have been discovered, once the search has ended, then shall

punishment fall justly on the guilty alone. As the princes continue on their way, Lakshmana succeeds in reminding his brother of the stringent obligations due on earth. Would Rāma wish to belie, in one moment, an entire life of self-abnegation?

'Hero, it is not that the desired recompense comes to crown the man who in the midst of action relaxes in his work and has not yet displayed his virtues or his vices." [1] Rāma lowers his bow and, leaning upon it, consults with his brother. They resume their march, and soon the king of the vultures appears to their view.

Jatāyu is dying. Rāma does not recognize him, and taking him for a Rākshasa in disguise, rushes violently upon him. A supplicating voice is heard, groaning, the old monarch reveals to Rāma the rape of Sītā, tells him who the author of it is, and describes the battle that is causing his death. For Sītā he had sacrificed himself; let the husband of her he had striven to save respect his agony.

Rama, perceiving his mistake, presses Jatāyu in his arms, and the two brothers weep bitterly.

The king of the vultures spends his last breath in relating to Rāma the circumstances of the capture. "Speak! . . . speak!" [2] says Rāma, breathlessly, bending over the dying king . . But death has already touched the only being, perhaps, that might have enlightened him upon his wife's fate.

. . . . . .

Further on, Kabandha, a Dānava,[3] whom the princes, by wounding him, free from the monstrous shape to which Indra had condemned him, counsels them to direct their way towards the river Pampā, to ascend the Rishyamūka, a delightful mountain inhabited by a prince of the yellow race, Sugrīva. With his help they will recover Sītā.

On the borders of the Pampā rises the hermitage of a female hermit, named Sāvarī Her spiritual preceptors had departed to heaven, and it will not be permitted to her to rejoin them

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap lxxi.
[2] Ibid., chap. lxxiii.
[3] Like the Daityas, the Dānavas are the enemies of the gods; like them, they are the sons of Kasyapa; but the first are born of Diti, the second of Danu

in their blessed abode until she has received a visit from the valiant Rāma. Wherever Rāma is seen, there people feel in him the presence of a saviour, a liberator. He releases from the curse that celestial spirits exiled to earth, labour under; and the hermits wait for him ere they die.

Rāma is astonished at Sāvarī's solitude; he believes her to be banished from the society of the hermits; but she conducts him to the wood surrounding her home. Under those balmy shades, full of mystery, she shows her guests the altar of sacrifice where only flowers are offered, and where can be preserved for ever, without losing either their tender colouring or their penetrating perfume, the verbenas, which had been lately lain upon it; she shows them the holy tīrthas, in which the hermits have, by the power of thought alone, assembled together the seven seas; and, attached to the trees, the bark vestments yet wet with the last ablutions of the anchorites. Finally, she implores from Rāma the right to rejoin those whom she has served with pious deference. The prince grants her this favour and Sāvarī, delivered from her earthly ties, flies upwards to the regions of bliss.

From this austere reception, from these poetic legends, from the peaceful smiling spot now the theatre of this scene, Rāma has received a serene inspiration; he is now calm and strong. A profound melancholy has replaced his acute grief, and to the ragings of passion succeed accents of exquisite sensibility.

It is spring time. On the banks of the Pampā everything is animated, everything smiles, everything loves and is loved, whilst Rāma suffers and suffers alone! Ah, how happy he would be, if in this charming abode he had by his side the wife for whom he weeps, and who, far away, weeps also for him!

"Alas! my beloved, with the eyes of a fawn, and a complexion of burnished gold, thou knowest that I am unhappy, that I am lost, that my mind is distracted.

"Do not forsake me, me banished by Kaikeyī, robbed of my kingdom, and reduced to live in the woods! How couldst thou leave me to-day, me, an exile, and depart, I know not where?

"Where is thy affection? Where are thy gentle words? Where is thy love? Where is thy tenderness? . . . Can it be

that thou knowest not, Janakide, how much my soul is tormented by pain and grief!"[1]

On the mountain Rishyamūka the Aryan princes meet that Sugrīva by whose aid, according to Kabandha's prediction, they ought to recover their lost one. Sugrīva understands Rāma's grief; he, too, has been obliged to leave his throne and go into exile; he, too, has been separated by violence from a beloved spouse; but, worse still than the Raghuide, a brother is the cause of his separation from country and wife. Rāma and Sugrīva, united by the tie of a common grief, embrace each other with effusion. Hanumān, the boldest and most skilful of Sugrīva's companions, strikes a spark by rubbing together two pieces of wood; and a brazier, wreathed with flowers, placed between the two new friends, seals their alliance. They perform a pradakshina (by going left to right) round the flame, and Sugrīva joyfully promises Rāma to recover Sītā; already he is on the traces of the captive; for they were his councillors and himself whom Sītā had seen, when Rāvana was carrying her off through the air; it was to them she had thrown her apparel and her ornaments. Sugrīva shows Rāma these sad relics: "Look!" he said to him;[2] and as Rāma gazes upon them, tears obscure his sight: "Alas!" he exclaims, "alas! well-beloved Janakide" He falls sobbing upon the ground, and never tires of pressing to his lips, what had touched the person of his wife.

Now, fury again succeeds grief. He questions Sugrīva. Where is the Rākshasa who has outraged his wife? Where is he, that Rāma may kill him, and that he may destroy all the black race with him, and even the god who created him?

His disordered features show the ravages of grief and anger. His eye, usually so calm and soft, turned to a purplish hue and seemed to dart fire, and the terrified Vānaras said amongst themselves: "He is enough enraged to destroy the universe!" Sugrīva wipes away the hero's tears and exhorts him to firmness He, member of an inferior race, has known how to conquer the sharp anguish the rape of a wife inflicts on a loving husband. Rāma, the Arya of heroic instincts, should he have less moral courage on this occasion than a man of the woods?

[1] *Aranyakānda*, chap lxxix
[2] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap v

"Meditate upon this maxim. 'A firm mind does not allow anything to break down its stedfastness; but the man who allows the breath of grief to agitate his soul, is insane. He is ever plunged in grief, much against his will, like a vessel beaten by the winds.'

"See! I raise my hands for the *anjali*; I incline my body; I supplicate thee.

"Arm thyself with courage and give not way to grief; for those who follow in the footsteps of sadness never meet with happiness . . .

"Grief destroys strength . . ."

Sugrīva has succeeded. Already Rāma only thinks of his friend's troubles; he swears to kill that very day, the brother who, unjustly, believing him to be guilty, had lately dethroned him. He sets Sugrīva, a prince weaker and more irresolute in his actions than in his discourses, an example of superhuman strength, and the little band directs its way towards the cavern Kishkindhyā, where dwells Bāli, the brother and enemy of Sugrīva.[1]

The allied princes arrange their plan. With insulting cries Sugrīva shall attract Bāli out of the cavern, and Rāma, seizing that moment, shall bend against him his invincible bow.

But when the two adversaries meet and fight together Rāma stands motionless . . . The two brothers are alike; there is nothing to enable him to distinguish one from the other. Sugrīva thinks there is treachery, and half-killed by the powerful grasp of his brother, he escapes to the woods Rāma persuades him of his innocence, and to prevent a similar perplexity in the future he prays Lakshmana to weave a garland of incense-bearing balsams which, passed round Sugrīva's neck, will make him easily recognizable.

A second time they arrive at the cavern Rāma urges Sugrīva to call out Bāli anew to the fight: "For," he adds, "this hero could not bear an insult cast at him by an enemy in battle-front, especially when his wives are witnesses, his valour is our warrant!"

When Sugrīva had carried out Rāma's order, he gazed sadly at the beautiful woody shades that had witnessed his birth "and the sight of these loved woods kindled flaming anger in the exile's heart."

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap xiii.

When the piercing call of Sugrīva echoed through the cavern Bāli was in his seraglio. He recognized his brother's voice, and his indignation bursts forth. He is about to rush out in answer to the warrior's challenge, when his wife Tārā,[1] the Andromache of the Rāmāyana, throws herself before him. Embracing him in her loving arms she tries to calm him. She dreads the struggle about to commence. If, after having been vanquished, Sugrīva returns to the charge with so much audacity, it is because he is not alone; and she has heard it said that a treaty of friendship, made a short time ago, unites him to the invincible Rāma. If the prince, who everywhere defends the cause of justice and the sacred rights of the oppressed, lends his support to Sugrīva, woe to his adversary! She supplicates Bāli to give back to Sugrīva the love he has never forfeited, and to confirm his succession to the throne. Let Bāli listen to the voice of nature. Even were Sugrīva guilty, is he not still his brother?

And with endearing words she tries to lull her husband's anger:—

"I beg of thee with all my strength; come, take my word, whether thou judgest it to be for thy good or because thou wouldst simply do something that is agreeable to me." Let their son Angada go and lay down the monarch's treasures at Rāma's feet, and conclude with him a treaty of peace; or else let Bāli and his family, of their own accord, fly from a kingdom from which, else, they are sure to be driven out.

These were generous and prudent counsels, but Bāli, proud of his strength, looks upon such a course to be cowardly. He fears neither Sugrīva nor even Rāma. Besides, he is aware of the latter's greatness of soul; in attacking a prince who has never offended him, Rāma would be wanting in his duty.

"Be not so anxious! I go to fight Sugrīva and to bring down his arrogance; but I will not deprive him of life."[2]

After these proud and generous words Bāli, like Hector consoling Andromache, reassures the noble wife: "Return with thy women, of what use is it to follow me again? I am grateful to thee for this love that thou hast shown me, noble lady.

[1] Tārā, like Esther, Stella, and Estelle, signifies star

[2] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap. xv

"Retire! I shall return; I swear it to thee on my life and my approaching victory; yes, I shall return, even I who speak to thee, as soon as I shall have vanquished my brother in combat." [1]

They embrace each other and the princess, weeping and shuddering, retires, followed by the women of the gynæceum, into the interior apartments Bāli rushes to the fight, Sugrīva fells him to the ground, but he rises again Perhaps he will take a signal revenge Rāma prevents him by shooting one of his sharp arrows Bāli sinks down, tears wet his manly face, and in a broken voice he gently reproaches Rāma for having on this occasion listened to another voice than that of justice:—

"What glory hopest thou from this death, dealt at the moment when my eyes were not turned in thy direction? For thou hast dealt me a cowardly blow, hidden from view, while this duel was engaging all my attention"

And with touching melancholy he speaks of those soon to be left desolate by his death:—

"The one whom I pity in this misfortune is not so much myself, nor Tārā, nor my parents, but my son Angada

"My caresses have been showered upon him since his infancy, and now, deprived of me for ever, this ill-fated child will be overwhelmed with lasting grief through perpetual remembrance of his father."

Sugrīva approaches the dying one, and Rāma in respectful silence also advances towards him

When Bāli speaks again it is to repent for having trusted to Rāma's generosity and for not having listened to Tārā's prudent voice on this subject Why this homicide? Was it a personal vengeance? Until that day Bāli had always had occasion to admire him who had now deprived him of life. Was it for ambition? But what pleasure could the sylvan domains of the men of the woods give to the Aryan kings, to masters of splendid cities? Was it to please Sugrīva and through his assistance to recover Sītā? But Bāli, a better man than the feeble Sugrīva, would have been a useful auxiliary. Finally, he commends to Rāma not only Angada, Tārā, and all the women of the gynæceum, but even Sugrīva.

[1] Ibid, chap xv

Rāma exonerates himself from Bāli's reproaches. This kingdom belongs to the children of Ikshwāku. The Deity has placed them there, not only to defend it, but also to be the mandatories of his supreme justice. Here the Arya's disdain for the aboriginal, whom he likens to a monkey, is found again in Rāma's language, and the hero justifies his conduct by rather arbitrary reasons. In punishing the inhabitants of the wood for their misdeeds, he does not believe he is more guilty than the hunter who, without remorse, deprives numberless animals of their lives. He must punish Bāli for his misdeed in making Rūmā, Sugrīva's spouse, one of the women of his gynæceum. Now, purified by the punishment inflicted upon him by Rāma, Bāli will live for ever in the happy world of saints. Bāli, repentant, prays Rāma to pardon him all his reproaches. He commends to him once more Sugrīva and Angada, adding: "Prevent, if possible, Sugrīva from scorning the chaste Tārā, only guilty because her husband is guilty." [1]

While Rāma is watching near the dying Bāli, and soothing his agony with consoling promises, Tārā is made aware of the result of the combat she had vainly tried to prevent.

Accompanied by her son, she rushes from the cavern, and meets in their flight the subjects of him who was lately a king. "Daughter of Jīva," they say to her, "return home and defend thy son Angada! Death, under the form of Rāma, has killed Bāli, and bears away his soul . . .

. . . . .

"May it please thee to celebrate Angada's coronation at once, this is the means, noble lady, of thy salvation." [2]

They hasten away to set up anew their homes in the most inaccessible regions of the forest; but what does royalty, son, or life signify now to Tārā? Her husband is killed; she has only one more desire—that of pressing her lips to the feet of the beloved.

The mother and son are seated on the ground. Tārā supports on her bosom the body of her child's father. The remembrance of the counsels lately given by her to Bāli and scorned by him, add to her grief. If he had listened to her voice, her son would not now be an orphan. Broken-

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap. xvii

[2] Ibid., chap. xviii

hearted, Tārā rolls upon the ground, lacerating her tender body; the women of the gynæceum with tears bewails their common misfortune, and endeavoured to console her.

What had become of the joyous hours which the young couple passed together? Nothing remained but their remembrance—a bitter remembrance.

"Surely," sobbed Tārā, "the fire of grief will devour my heart at the remembrance of thy cheerfulness, always bright, of thy conversation, always enlivened by thy frank smile. That time has passed away, never to return, those hours of delightful walks enjoyed with thee in the woods perfumed with sweet odours!

"Racked with grief, left behind by thee, life has no longer any charm in my eyes; besides, separated from thee, it will be a struggle to preserve my life! .

. . . . .

"Let the world say if it likes, 'She is a mother without pity!' when it sees me give up Angada, my beloved son of the lovely form.

"In the heart of a wife, neither son nor father holds the same position as a husband . ." [1]

She enlarges upon the sad position of a wife who, at her husband's death, must submit to her son's authority, and her words explain all the bitterness of her position.

"Yes! I shall part from life, far from me be it to accept that shelter that is ready for me near my son! Better is it to descend to the tomb and follow my husband! It pleases me to take this path and to throw away an odious life, I will accompany my husband in his journey towards the eternal Paradise!"

She divested herself of her ornaments and abandoned herself without reserve to her mad grief. Casting wild glances around, she recognized Sugrīva "Now, Sugrīva! rid me of this life! Be it far from me to live the miserable life of a wife whom death has separated from her virtuous husband!

"Thou didst kill me the same moment when thou didst deal the fatal blow that killed my beloved one; for it is far better for wives to be struck themselves by death than to live and see death striking their husbands!"

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap xix.

Sugrīva, dismayed by this explosion of grief and anger, remained silent and motionless, his eyes fixed upon the ground. Then Tārā, turning her indignation upon Rāma, reproaches him for what she considers to be a crime. She might avenge herself by a curse that will make Sītā lose what Rāma's chaste companion considers dearer than even her husband—her honour! She will not do it, it would be too cruel; nevertheless she shall be avenged Rāma, it is true, shall recover his wife; but a day will come when the young queen, always loving and always loved, will be exiled by Rāma himself, who will supplicate the earth to open once more and receive into her maternal bosom the furrow-born Virgin.

Meanwhile, life had not completely left Bāli. Folded in loving arms, he dimly heard the sobs heaving the bosom that supported his head, he roused himself, and before sinking into everlasting sleep, was able, for the last time, to supplicate Sugrīva to protect his wife and orphan.

"Tārā, here," he said, "the daughter of Sushēna, is a wise counsellor in delicate matters; and is never wanting in prescience that enables her to forecast all possible issues from present signs and omens Has she said: 'It is well?' then carry out thy design in all assurance; for nothing ever happens contrary to her judgments." [1]

A few minutes after Bāli's soul quitted this world, and Tārā, covering the corpse with kisses and tears, groaning for her son and herself, deplored the life of a warrior's wife; in the morning, the wife of a conquering hero; in the evening, the widow of one conquered.

The funeral ceremonies are arranged by Rāma Behind the coffin walks Tārā and the women of the gynæceum, supporting the orphan Arrived at the place where the pyre is prepared, Tārā, lifting her husband's head from the bier, bids a last farewell to one soon to be delivered to the flames, and Angada himself consigns his father's body to the flames.

Rāma, faithful to his vow of penitence, refuses to enter the town with Sugrīva. Commanding the latter to consecrate Angada, the heir-apparent, as king, he reminds him of the task remaining to be accomplished after the rainy season.

While Sugrīva, reunited to his wife Rūmā, dwelt in happiness

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap. XXI

in the palace, Rāma, retiring into a mountain cavern, was again enduring that isolation from which he had momentarily escaped. Now sinking under the load of his grief, now sustained by Lakshmana, who exhorted him to maintain his strength for the hour of battle, thus did Rāma pass the rainy season. He contrasted his fate to that of the happy Sugrīva, in possession once more of the joys of the domestic hearth and of royal honours, and, in his divine mildness, not wishing to tear Bāli's brother away too soon from a happiness of which he had been so long deprived, he waited until autumn might allow the assembling of the armies.

The rains had ceased, the time for the expedition was propitious, and yet Sugrīva took no action

Quenching the "thirst of ten years", to quote the strong expression that the national poet of Italy was, in later times, to use, when describing another reunion after another exile; restored to the companion he had wept for, united to the Tārā he had loved, master of his brother's gynæceum, Sugrīva in the midst of these delights, forgot the Kishkindhyā cavern The austere thought of duty did not for long occupy the changeful mind of the prince, lulled to sleep in the midst of intoxicating pleasures.

He was at last roused. Hanumān, the wisest of his councillors and most valorous of his warriors, reproached him for his indolence, reminded him of the promise sworn to the Raghuide, of the gratitude due to the unhappy hero. and Sugrīva, rousing himself from his torpor, directed Hanumān to assemble the armies immediately.

Meanwhile, Rāma was despairing of Sugrīva's assistance. He saw Earth reappearing under her liquid veil and shining with purest brightness after her regenerating bath, and for the first time, since his marriage with the princess of Videha, was he alone when contemplating this resurrection of Nature.

"How was she passing her time?" groaned he, "my young love, who sees the flowers of the water-lilies and the woodbine displayed like gold in a jeweller's window; but sees me not! This woman of the soft voice and of the beautiful person, who awoke formerly to the notes of the swans, how does she wake now?" . . .[1]

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap. xxiv.

In his distraction he believed he was speaking to Lakshmana, though he was alone.

It was in this sad state that Sumitrā's son found his unhappy brother on his return. He cheered him and reassured him about Sītā: "Defended by her virtue, the daughter of king Janaka is a difficult conquest for an enemy; O thou who didst merit her choice, cease to afflict thyself! . . ."

When Rāma, weary of Sugrīva's cruel delay, orders Lakshmana to repair to the court of that indigenous prince and to make the voluptuous monarch listen to the severe voice of honour, Lakshmana, quick to be angered, is for chastening the ungrateful creature, but Rāma, imposing silence on his youthful ardour, prays his brother not to depart from that moderation which is the mark and seal of great characters.

When the Sumitride arrived at the Kishkindhyā cavern his frowning looks filled the Vānaras with terror. Sugrīva was with Tārā, the reunited couple, disturbed by the uproar outside, both entered the council chamber. Sugrīva, who had just commanded his warriors to assemble, could not account for the anger of his ally, it was again Hanumān who, reminding him of his delay in carrying out his promises, made clear to him the reason of this unexpected visit.

Lakshmana, introduced into the council chamber, saw Sugrīva seated on a golden throne, his two queens beside him, Rūmā on his right, Tārā on his left, while two charming women attendants waved over him the fan and the fly-flap.

In contrast with this scene, Lakshmana pictured to himself his brother seated on a stone in a wild abode, and his anger redoubled. Sugrīva and his two wives advanced respectfully to meet and salute him This submission did not calm Lakshmana, who accosted him in violent terms as one whom he believed to be ungrateful. Far, indeed, from his thoughts was the moderation that his brother had recommended.

Insultingly, he calls Sugrīva the slave of women, the plaything of his passions, tells him of Rāma's anger and of its probable consequences . . . But a gentle voice is heard; Tārā is taking up her husband's defence, and tries to calm the young man's violent emotion. The king does not deserve, and above all from Lakshmana, those cruel reproaches. His gratitude has been won for ever for the hero who has given him a throne and the hand of Tārā, and, above all, restored to him

a long-repined-for companion. Even if he has abandoned himself for a time to the delights of his present situation, would it not be unjust to reproach him for it ?

" Let Lakshmana, the noble Raghuide, deign to excuse an unhappy being, who has passed ten years in the fatigues of exile and in the privation of every object of desire

" And thou, hero, son of Raghu, do not throw thyself thus at one bound under the power of anger, before knowing what has been determined on here." [1]

She urges Lakshmana to respect Sugrīva, as Rāma himself had done—Sugrīva, his brother's best friend. Then, bowing her noble forehead, she supplicates the young prince on behalf of the monarch who was about to sacrifice his kingdom, his life, his very wives, for him to whom he owes them all Already has Sugrīva ordered his troops to assemble for the Raghuide, and Sugrīva alone would not be able to destroy Rāvana's army ; such is the cause of the delay of the expedition But the beloved of Rāma, the charming princess of Videha, shall be rescued. Of this, Tārā gives the prince her solemn assurance

Lakshmana listens with respect to the queen's exhortations, and his anger vanishes. Also, when Sugrīva implores the indulgence of Rāma, of him who was his saviour, Lakshmana, touched and repentant, overwhelms him with praises.

" But," he adds, " come away at once now ; come, hero, with me, come to console thy friend, whose heart is torn with the thought of his ravished spouse " [2]

And in his turn he prays Sugrīva's pardon for the bitter words wrung from him by the remembrance of his brother's troubles

It is in Rāma's retreat that Sugrīva assembles his innumerable troops. To all parts of the known world [3] he sends his warriors in search of the beautiful Videhan. All must return in the space of one month. To the tardy defaulter, the supreme penalty ; but to him who shall discover the retreat of the ravisher, royal honours ! It is in Hanumān that Sugrīva places most hope ; to him he confides the

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap xxxv

[2] Ibid., chap xxxvi

[3] This part of the poem is curious from the numerous geographical terms, resulting from the instructions of Sugrīva to the chiefs of his army A few appear to be fabulous

exploration of the southern country, which he supposes must be inhabited by Rāvana; to him also Rāma delivers a ring engraved with his name, that by means of this jewel the prudent warrior might obtain the confidence of the captive

On the Vānaras beginning their march, the poet draws a fantastic picture of their mode of beginning the campaign: "They advanced, running fast, crying, howling, roaring, grinding their teeth · 'We shall bring back,' cried the monkeys, 'we shall bring back Sītā, were she already in the jaws of death or plunged in the depths of the ocean, or dragged to the bottom of hell!'"[1]

At the end of a month, all the army, excepting the one commanded by Angada and Hanumān, had returned to Rāma and Sugrīva, their search had been fruitless. Upon the son of the Wind rested the last hopes of the army and its chiefs.

But Hanumān and his companions were just then in great danger. After vainly exploring the Vindhya mountain, they had got entangled in impenetrable thickets, and suffering from hunger, and, still more horrible, from thirst; nevertheless, they continued their march, vainly seeking, after the energetic expression of the poet, for "a trickle of Sītā"[2]

They were despairing of all deliverance, when they saw a number of aquatic birds fly out of a cavern Hope reanimates the warriors and they enter the grotto But darkness envelopes them; they hold each other's hands, wandering about the cavern, mad with terror

During this gloomy journey, the month allotted by Sugrīva had elapsed What an alternative! Here, the tortures of thirst and the horrors of darkness! There, dishonour and death! Suddenly a ray of light smiles upon them. They follow eagerly in its direction and find themselves in an enchanted spot.

Upon golden trees with purple fruit, upon limpid streams with golden fishes, upon palaces of crystal and gold with window-panes of fine pearls, upon mines of precious stones, streamed floods of light Upon a golden throne sat a woman, not covered with gold, but clad in bark and in the skin of a black antelope. In the midst of perfumed drinks and

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap xlv.
[2] Ibid, chap l

exquisitely cooked dishes, she was observing a fast; for she was an anchorite. The poet of India loves contrasts.

Hanumān, surprised, approaches her, and salutes her with the title of august saint. At his prayer, she tells him how and by whom had been constructed that fairy grotto, of which she is only the guardian. After offering them water, roots, and fruit, she desires to be informed by what adventure the men of the woods had been led to that inaccessible spot. Hanumān satisfies her curiosity and begs her to tell him how those whom she had rescued from death can show her their gratitude.

But the penitent, Swayamprabhā, answers with dignity: "I am satisfied with you all, monkeys of great prowess; I keep to the path of duty; so I need nobody to do anything for me here." [1]

She, however, accedes to the request of the men of the woods by guiding them out of the cavern, which they had thought they never could come out of She had this power by virtue of her austerities and her union with God. Shortly afterwards the Vānaras find themselves on the shores of the Ocean

They shudder at the thought of the punishment awaiting them on their return to Sugrīva Angada exhorts them to die voluntarily of hunger on that deserted coast, for who can assure him that his uncle would not joyfully seize on an occasion for inflicting on Bāli's son an undeserved punishment? Hanumān opposes with all his might the proposal of the juvarāja, and reminds Angada that he has not an enemy, but a father, in Sugrīva The prince refuses to listen to him. His companions may return to Kishkindhyā, as for him, he will await death here He charges them with his farewell to Sugrīva, and adds with emotion "After saluting Tārā, I beg you to acquit yourselves of the same message of farewell to her, and to sustain the courage of this good mother to bear it

"Nature has put into her heart tenderness for her son; she is full of sensibility; she is devoted to works of penitence; and no doubt at the news that I died here, she will also desire to quit this life." [2]

[1] *Kishkindhyākānda*, chap lvi

[2] Ibid, chap lv

Then the young man sat down upon the grass and wept bitterly.

The warriors, indignant with Sugrîva and animated with the most tender sympathy for the son of their old king, refuse to leave him. A vulture was watching the men from afar off, rejoicing at the thought of prey. But the name of Jatâyu, pronounced by Angada, arrests his ear, and fills him with emotion; for he is indeed the brother of Sîtâ's defender. He anxiously questions the Vânaras, and from them he learns of his brother's death. Their cause becomes his own. He will assist Râma in his vengeance. He remembers having seen Râvana in his flight, carrying with him a young and beautiful woman. "Râma, Râma! succour me, Lakshmana!" he heard her crying; it was Sîtâ, and her ravisher was going towards the island of Lankâ.

At last traces of the captive have been discovered.

Hanumân, the son of the Wind, crossed at a single bound the distance of one hundred yojanas,[1] which separated the Indian continent from the ancient Ceylon. The incidents that happen during his crossing resemble more a dream than a reality, and a dream of the most fantastic sort. The marvellous of an epic poem is here replaced by the marvellous of a fairy tale

When Hanumân enters Lankâ, the rays of the moon are playing upon the white palaces of the Râkshasas.

"The moon, favouring the intrepid messenger, rises, surrounded by the crowd of stars and, diffusing her light, she sheds a thousand rays over the three worlds. Transparent as the mother-of-pearl of the sea, white as milk or as the fibres of the lotus, she rises, illuminating the night before the intent gaze of the satyr, and swims in the heavens like a swan in a lake." [2]

Examining with a searching eye each house, Hanumân tries if he can discover in any Râma's spouse. He sees, here, women of matronly looks, performing the exacting obligations of marriage: elsewhere, young married couples, decorated with flowers and humming-birds, whose hearts

[1] A yojana measures five English miles, of 1,609 metres each.

[2] *Sundarakânda*, chap. xi. (Translated by M. Eichhoff in his *Heroic poetry of the Indians*. A work already quoted.)

open to the happiness of mutual love ; but nowhere does he recognize Sītā, whose features he had indeed not been able to mark, as she passed through the air, but whose fame had traced in his heart an ineffaceable image.

He penetrates into Rāvana's palace, and Valmīki draws a marvellous picture of this residence, in which all the jewels of the casket of the East seem to be gathered together At the court of black kings as at that of Aryan kings, the interior service of the palace is entrusted to women of the most distinguished rank and of the noblest birth.

In this palace was the chariot Pushpaka, and in this magic chariot, another palace, the actual habitation of Rāvana

Golden windows, doors of lapis lazuli, walls panelled with ivory, crystal floors, stairs of precious stones, columns inlaid with pearls, banners floating in the air, carpets representing the various configurations of the earth, transparent waters, birds, flowers, perfumes, and music ; all strike, charm, transport Hanumān

In this palace, which he believes must be Swarga, are gathered the most beautiful women of the universe, and whilst admiring them Hanumān says to himself "These, no doubt, are the stars that are seen falling from time to time, cast out of heaven, and have all come and assembled together here." [1]

During the great century of our history, did the exquisite gallantry of courts ever express itself with more artistic grace ?

Amongst these women some had been lulled to sleep by their own harmonious strains, and their arms still encircled the cymbals, trumpets, tambourines, lyres, and flutes, which lately were vibrating under their touch

But the charmed gaze of Hanumān is directed to one woman : "Queen of the gynæceum, this blonde favourite, her complexion, the colour of gold, was lying there on a superb divan Mandodari was her name " [2]

"That may be Sītā," says Hanumān to himself ; but he remembers what Rāma's spouse should be, he will not find her in the abode of pleasure

During this search his conscience begins to smite him. He has entered the gynæceum of another ! Has he failed in

[1] *Sundarakānda*, chap. xiii.
[2] Ibid., chap xiv.

his duty? No; guided by pure motives he has endeavoured to accomplish the mission entrusted to him. Intention alone constitutes crime.

Already he had searched every corner in town and palace, down to the smallest, and despairing of success in his enterprise, he almost believed in the possible death of the princess for whom so many efforts had been vainly made. He reflected on the sad results of such an event. Sītā lost, what would become of Rāma and, with him, of the two allied races?

Lost in these melancholy reflections, and weeping bitterly, he perceived from the top of the rampart where he was sitting a grove of asokas not yet explored by him.

Hanumān rushed to the golden grove, carpeted with soft grass, through which flowed a river lined with grottos. The *asoka* (Jonesia A. Roxb.), which at dawn gives out its most fragrant scent, the *cordia* (Sans shēlu), from whose graceful stem exhales the odour of musk, the *champaka* (Michelia C. Linn), with its topaz-like colours, the pine, whose sombre green adds brilliancy to the fiery petals of the *butea* (Sans dhāk, palāsa), and the delicately variegated corolla of the mango, all these trees, entwined round about with the flexible liana, grouped together like leafy houses and interlaced like basket-work, shed a dark, mysterious shadow. The rapid course of the son of the Wind shakes the branches, that shed in a perfumed shower their flowers and fruit, and the birds, wakened before their time, leave their nests and take to flight.

Dawn was breaking Hanumān heard from afar the holy men reciting the Vedas, and the musicians, with the most melodious strains cleaving the air. Climbing up a *cinsapa*,[1] which stood at some distance in all its full-blown luxuriance, he watched.

We confess that it is not without some hesitation that we now introduce the Rākshasas, whom Hanumān soon perceived. Will the French mind, the most perfect mirror of human reason, and the French taste, so pure and correct, will it accept some of the types that Shakespeare might have loved, and which, in the witches of Macbeth, the immortal tragedian had unconsciously created as their counterparts?

[1] *Dalbergia sissoo*

Let us remember the horror inspired in the Aryans by these black men and cannibals, to whom they attributed diabolical powers and gave the name of Rākshasas; let us pardon the Indian poet for having given way to the strange fancies of imagination, and let us endeavour to seize, under the strange colours in which he has painted them, the portraits of the black races of ancient Ceylon.

We will not pause over the repulsive exterior to which the Oriental imagination lends itself. Neither will we describe those strange shapes that belong to the nature more of beasts than of human beings Armed with hammers, lances, swords, and great iron pikes, they are always ready to maintain their quarrels with their weapons. This was their supreme pleasure The juicy fruits of the grove had no temptation for their monstrous appetites, but flesh and blood—it is these they have lived on

In the midst of these Furies (megairas) was a woman of the white race She was clasping with her arms the very tree which was sheltering Hanumān The cruel ravages of grief were marked on her wasted features; but her pale face shone with that beauty which is the reflection of the immortal soul

In her Hanumān has recognized Sītā

It was then for the sake of this woman that so many valorous exploits had been performed, so many great designs conceived! And there she was, her head bent drooping, her eyes bathed in tears, her hair carelessly plaited into a single tress, her frame robed in faded garments! There she was, "one so worthy of happiness, one who had not even known the name of misfortune!" [1]

"If Rāma," said the man of the woods to himself, "for her sake were to turn the whole earth upside down, as far as the borders of the sea, the whole world would sanction that action with universal approbation If one put in the scales the empire of the three worlds on one side, and the daughter of the king Janaka on the other, the three worlds themselves would not, I think, weigh as much as Sītā the Janakide!

"To be separated from the noble and tender Sītā and to survive for a single moment, is a heavy burden to bear, and yet Rāma bears the burden!"

[1] *Sundarakānda*, chap. xviii.

Hanumān's eyes were wet with tears on seeing the princess born of a furrow plunged into such misfortune; one, who a king's daughter, ought to be a king's wife.

He recalled to mind Rāma's sufferings.

"The heart of this queen is all his, and Rāma's heart is all hers.

"It is because they both well know this truth, this duty incarnate, that they are both still alive under these agonies.

. . . . . .

"Deprived of her husband this woman only clings to life through hoping to be reunited to him. She does not see the Rākshasas, she does not see these trees adorned with flowers; she sees Rāma with the eyes of her heart fixed upon one single object.

"Assuredly, a woman without adornments finds her husband the most beautiful of all adornments; and were she without jewels, she might shine with the love she bears to her husband."[1]

This smiling spot now gives Hanumān only sad thoughts; for there, guarded by furies, is the woman so lately watched over by Rāma and Lakshmana When just setting, the moon that had been veiled with clouds reappeared, and shed her vaporous light upon the grove of asokas. It was the hour when the royal bards sang the morning hymn to Rāvana. Soon roused by it, the monarch directed his way towards Sītā's retirement.

A hundred women, whose movements made the bells round their anklets and girdles tinkle merrily, accompanied him, lighting him on his way with golden lamps in which burned perfumes, fanning away importunate insects with their yak-tail fans, ready to refresh him with the beverages they carried in their golden cups.

Hanumān was all observation.

Rāvana approached Sītā, shaking with convulsive tremors, and clutching fitfully with her fingers at the robes that covered her When Rāvana humbly, tenderly begged her to smile upon what he called happiness and glory, the young woman did not receive his discourse with an explosion of anger. With grave and sad mien she tried to make Rāvana listen to the voice of honour and generosity. She appealed to

[1] Ibid, chap xix.

sentiments of magnanimity and delicacy: but these the heart of such a creature was incapable of understanding.

"It is a shameful deed, which I ought not to commit," she said slowly, "I, a virtuous woman, married into a pure family, and born in an illustrious one." And, turning aside:

"I am the wife of another," she added, "I cannot then be a suitable wife for thee, go, fix thy eyes upon duty; pursue the path of goodness!

. . . . . .

"Neither thy empire, nor thy riches can seduce me; I belong only to Rāma, as light belongs only to the day star.

. . . . . .

"Come, Rāvana, come, restore me to Rāma in my grief.

. . . . .

"Reason commands thee, Rāvana, to save thy city, and to gain the love of the valiant Raghuide, unless thou desirest a dreadful death."[1]

Rāvana, losing patience, would have been tempted to kill her, were he not still ruled by that compassion that gives birth in the heart of man to love for the daughters of Manu, were he not prevented by a voice stronger than that of anger from striking a woman He granted to the captive a delay of two months That time elapsed, let her choose the throne or the tomb

The daughters of the gods and of the Gandharvas, who thronged the seraglio of Rāvana, touched with gentle sympathy for this young woman, their sister, reassured her by their expressive glances. and Sītā thus continued the struggle —

"If I have not yet made of thee," she said "a heap of ashes, O criminal soul, by consuming thee with the refulgence that my austerities have acquired for me, it is that I ought not to act without knowing Rāma's will, nor violate the calm imposed upon me by the vow of penitence"[2]

Rāvana exclaims "I will kill thee to-day as the rising sun kills the dawn" He delivers her anew to the Rākshasīs, orders them to make her amenable to his designs, and, drunk with fury, retires with his attendants The Rākshasīs rush upon the frail young woman, they jeer at, and insult, her,

[1] Ibid, chap. xxiii.
[2] Ibid, chap. xxiv.

and wound her delicate instincts by their gross remarks:—"What! a mere mortal woman is not proud of the love of the conqueror of the gods? She prefers a mendicant to him."

And Sītā answered. "My soul repulses like sin this language uttered from your lips . . . If he is unhappy or banished from his kingdom, yet the man who is my husband is the man whom I ought to venerate . . . It is then impossible that I renounce my husband; is he not a divinity for me?"[1]

The Rākshasīs, exasperated, threatened her with their weapons, and bent towards her such faces as the nightmare conjures up. Sītā fled, but these furies pursued her everywhere and formed around her their infernal circle. One of them, Vinatā, or the Humpback, tries to win her by gentleness; but the ending of her discourse is far from being as reassuring as the beginning appeared to be:—

"If thou followest not the counsel that I give thee here, we shall all eat thee, even this very hour!"

Vikatā, the Hipshot, lifting her fist, vociferated these words: "Our gentleness and benevolence for thee have made us listen patiently to far too many unseemly words! Because of thee, my young child, we are overwhelmed with cares and troubles! Why delay further, Sītā? Love Rāvana or die!"

And another she-prowler of the night, Horse's Head, whose eyes darted flames, dropped odious counsels and dark threats from her lips

A fourth, designated by the expressive name of Belly of Thunder, flaming, brandishing a pike, already gloats over the long expected pleasure of regaling herself with the delicate flesh of the daughter of the Aryans and of drinking her pure blood.

The Humpback, resuming, proposes to her companions to strangle Sītā, and then to announce to the king of the Rākshasas that the death of the young woman had been natural and sudden, whose remains Rāvana will then allow them to partake.

"Let us divide her then amongst us all, for I do not like disputes," adds a fifth Rākshasī, Goat's Head.

"I approve of what Goat's Head has just told us. Bring her," returned Surpanakhā, the fury whose nails would each



[1] Ibid., chap. xxv

have made a winnowing-fan, "bring intoxicating liquors and heaps of garlands of many colours. When we shall have dined well on human flesh, we shall dance where the victims are burnt! If she will not do as we have told her, well, let us kneel down upon her, each on one knee, and eat her all in company together."

Sītā, distracted with terror, trembling, weeping, still raised her gentle voice protesting her devotion to her husband. Exhausted, she leant against a branch loaded with clusters of asokas . . .

Suddenly she cries: "Alas! Rāma . . . Ah! Lakshmana . . . Alas! Kausalyā, my mother-in-law! Alas! noble Sumitrā! . . ."[1] She envies the lot of those whose eyes still behold Rāma; she asks herself, for what crime committed in a previous existence can she be deserving of such a punishment in this present one. She would gladly die, but her guards, reserving her for other torments, keep strict watch over her. She deplores the weakness of man, unable, deprived of all means but his will, to deliver himself from the burden of life which has been laid upon him. She offers herself to the tortures with which the Rākshasīs threaten her:—

"Of what use is it for you to continue talking? I shall not unite myself to Rāvana!"

But why is not Rāma already near her?

"He does not come to my succour, he, whose single arm overthrew in Janasthāna fourteen millions of Rākshasas!

"Without doubt, he does not know, this eldest brother of Lakshmana, that I am detained here: for if he knew it, this hero, full of prowess, would not endure for a moment the violence that is done to me!

"He does not come to my succour; he who in the forest of Dandaka could kill with a single arrow Virādha, that terrible chief of the Rākshasas."

If Rāma knew the place of her exile, the ruins of Lankā would be witness of the hero's vengeance, and the echoes of the city would repeat the lamentations of the widows of the Rākshasas, as they repeat to-day the plaints of the wife torn from Rāma.

Some of the Rākshasīs go to report to their master the

[1] Ibid., chap xxvi.

defiant language of the captive; others throw themselves upon her, preparing for vengeance. But among these, there was one, who, lying on the ground, had hitherto kept silence. It was the old Trijatā. Suddenly her voice is heard. Let her companions devour *her*; they shall not devour Sītā, "the beloved daughter of the king Janaka, and the darling daughter-in-law of the great Dasaratha."

"Indeed," she adds, "a horrible thought, and one which causes the hair to rise with horror, offers to my mind a presentiment of death for the Rākshasas and of life for the husband of this woman." [1]

The Rākshasīs leave the young queen and make a circle round Trijatā. What has she seen?

She has seen the triumph of Rāma, the reunion of the wife to her husband. She has seen Rāvana hurled from his chariot, his head shorn, his limbs stained with purplish ointment. Clothed in a red garment, and decked with crimson wreaths, he was indulging in bursts of laughter. A chariot drawn by asses was taking him towards the Southern coast, a lake of mud . . . Suddenly a black woman, dressed in red, threw a cord round his neck, and dragged him to those sinister regions where reigns Yama, the god of death.

She has seen the Rākshasas, covered with red garments, their foreheads bare of hair, drinking, dancing, singing, playing. On one side the waves of the Ocean were invading Lankā, and on the other, on the ruins of the town reduced to cinders, were seen Rākshasīs quenching their thirst with the liquid dedicated to the dead, the oil of sesame. They were uproarious: shouting with laughter. And a voice cried: "Fly! . . die! . for the Raghuide, inflamed with anger, will certainly kill all the Rākshasas here!

"Of a certainty Rāma will not endure the many menaces and invectives cast at the wife whom he loves and esteems, and who lived faithfully up to her vows in his forest hermitage!"

The prediction is soon to be fulfilled. Trijatā feels it . . . she sees it . . On the person of Sītā are they not now being manifested—those presages foretelling victory? . . . "Delivered now from her numerous griefs, she sees her beloved before her eyes. Rākshasīs, let us all implore Sītā!"

[1] Ibid., chap xxvii

The virtues of Rāma's spouse assure her triumph. It is to ruin the Rākshasas that the gods have sent her this trouble. Let the companions of Trijatā respect the woman who has not deserved such sufferings.

"I see the hour approaching in which Rāvana will perish, Rāma will triumph, and happiness will be born again to Sītā."

At the same moment, a bird singing on the branch, murmured in Sītā's ear consoling accents, and its joyous warbling seemed to announce deliverance, reunion, happiness, to the captive. The influence of these presages revived the young wife, as, says the poet, "the rain revives a root dried up by the winds and sun, but in which the gods wish still to preserve life."[1]

Hanumān had seen and heard all this.

In great perplexity he asked himself how, without frightening Sītā, and without attracting the attention of her guards, he could address himself to the princess. After reflecting a long time, he softly utters these words: "There was a king named Dasaratha . . ."[2] and he draws a beautiful and touching portrait of the late king of Ayodhyā. "His eldest son is called Rāma ." he continues; and he praises the prince, who, accompanied by his wife and his brother left, in order to redeem his father's word, a throne for a hermitage; the prince, who was at that moment living separated from his beloved spouse, whom Rāvana had carried off

Suddenly he adds: "Queen whose birth Videha saw, thy husband, Rāma, tells thee by my mouth that happier things are in store, and thy husband's young brother, Lakshmana, the hero, wishes thee joy."

Here Hanumān stopped, but Sītā was still listening.

Who, then, was it who dares to speak to her with tender respect for those she loved? Whose was that voice whose consoling accents were filling her heart with indescribable joy? But she is fearful still, and anxiously raises her eyes in the direction of the voice On a branch of the tree at the foot of which she was reposing, she sees a man of the woods. Then she thinks it must be a dream. No doubt, dejected and crushed, she has fallen asleep, and dreamed of him in whose keeping she has left her soul. Is it not become usual with

[1] Ibid., chap. xxxiii
[2] Ibid., chap. xxx

her? Yet the reality is there: evident, palpable ... And the dream is but an illusion ... She prays. Heaven alone can enlighten her, and from the lips of the young wife escapes this ardent supplication :—

"Adoration to Shiva, to the god holding the lightning, to the self-existent Being! Adoration, also, to the Fire! If there is something real in what the inhabitant of the woods says, may these gods deign to make all his words come true!"

Hanumān, prostrate before her, supplicates her to confirm him in his surmise :—

"If thou art Sītā, the Videhan, whom Rāvana one day carried off by force from the Janasthāna, confirm to me, noble lady, the truth."[1] Joyously, Sītā relates to him her birth and her history. Hanumān resuming, reassures the young wife about Rāma's lot; with touching delicacy he dwells for a long time on Lakshmana's message, the brother whom Sītā had for an instant slighted, the young brother who, according to the law, is looked upon as her son.

"Lakshmana, of the long arms, the joy of Sumitrā, his mother, salutes thee, inclining his head before thee, but is consumed by grief; for thou art always present in thy son's thoughts, as a son is always present in his mother's thoughts." And Hanumān, revealing to her who that golden gazelle really was whom Rāma had pursued and killed, adds: "The virtuous Lakshmana, to do thee pleasure, obeyed docilely the biting words that thou madest him hear on that occasion: for thy young brother-in-law is always full of respectful submission for thee, queen"

A long and burning sigh escapes from the bosom of the young woman ... Ah! what if that inhabitant of the woods, respectfully inclined before her was, after all, a Rākshasa in disguise: was perhaps Rāvana himself! ... Shame to him, then, in thus making sport of her, and adding to her misfortune another suffering, the most cruel of all, that of deception! But if he is really a messenger from Rāma, then hail, all hail to him!

To assure herself of that fact she commands him to tell her what were the virtues of this Rāma who had sent him, and how this strange alliance had been formed between

[1] *Ibid.*, chap xxxi

the descendants of the proud conquerors ot India and those of the much-despised aborigines.

Hanumān answers Sītā's questions and, promising her deliverance, presents her with Rāma's ring.

Tears of joy now stifle the poor wife. Only by sacrificing to the gods will she be able to thank them some day for this happy event. She praises Hanumān's merit, and judges it not unworthy on her part to converse with one who does not fear Rāvana, and who knows how to appreciate Rāma. She plies him with questions; but asks him first of all whether Rāma's misfortune has not depressed his courage, if his spirit is still firm, his arm valiant, his heart still open to sentiments of piety, justice, and love? If it is quite true that the hero loves her still, and still suffers when absent from her? And, finally, why does he not rescue her?

"Queen," answers Hanumān, "thy Raghuide does not know yet that thou art here; on my return his arrows will soon consume this city.

. . . . .

"Thy Raghuide, woman of the large eyes,—he always thinks of thee . . .

"The only pleasure he has is that, Videhan, which his soul gives him when remembering thee"

Asleep or awake, Rāma is always with her in spirit. He fancies he sees her in flower, in fruit, in everything that shines bright and smells sweet; in everything that is pleasing to womankind. "Sītā," he murmurs in his gentle voice; and when, running towards the object of his illusion, he perceives his mistake: "Where dwellest thou, Videhan? Where art thou?" And his voice dies away in tears.

Hanumān's discourse fills the heart of the young wife with both joy and grief. Rāma suffers, but he suffers for her! He is her only refuge; she knows through Nandā, the daughter of the virtuous Vibhīshana, that the latter has in vain advised Rāvana to restore her to her husband. Only Rāma's courage can now save her.

Touched by the burning tears flowing from the prisoner's eyes, Hanumān, in the enthusiasm of his devotion, proposes that he should place her, even that very day, in Rāma's arms. Supported on his strong shoulders, she could cross the Ocean!

What an enrapturing prospect! Here, torture imminent death; there, reunion and life! Now, grief; in an instant, happiness! Nevertheless, Sītā refuses . . . Never will she lean on any other arm but her husband's. What sublime delicacy, similar to that immortalized thousands of years afterwards in a virgin type, created by one of the most poetic geniuses of the West! Not secretly should the insulted wife of a hero return to her husband, but on the triumphal chariot of the avenged spouse.

Hanumān admires the divine modesty of the young wife. He begs her for a sign which might assure Rāma that he has really seen the captive.

Sītā, in a voice choked with sobs, slowly pronounces these words:—

"Say to the king of men: "Sītā, the Janakide, who is vowed to the task of retaining thy favour, is lying, a prey to grief, at the foot of an asoka, asleep on the bare ground . . .

. . . . . .

"Lord of the earth, thou art full of prowess, thou hast arrows, thou hast weapons; and Rāvana, who deserves death, lives still Then arouse thyself!"

To this overpowering appeal succeed severe reproaches. Sītā gazes still at Hanumān weeping bitterly, sharing her grief. Then disclosing everything to that friendly heart, she gives full play to her tender effusions of love for her husband: "I aspire to see once more Rāma's face, that face radiant like the flower of the lotus, pure as the shining disk of the moon. On seeing him, O messenger! I should feel the same joy as the earth when she receives the morning dew upon her half-open ears of corn . . ." [1]

Then, with charming frankness and bashful grace, she recalls the memory of those two scenes on the mount Chitrakūta which we have described elsewhere; the brilliant tilaka drawn by Rāma on her forehead and the punishment of the troublesome crow. And lastly, detaching from her hair the jewel that fastened her silken tresses: "Give this to Rāma," [2] she said to Hanumān.

The messenger is now about to leave her.

[1] Translated by M Eichhoff, *Poésie heroïque des Indiens.*

[2] *Sundarakânda*, chap. xxxvi.

"In order that my glorious husband may hasten to save me while I am yet alive, it is necessary, Hanumān, to say to him these words: "Fulfil thy duty!"[1]

The thought of duty would double the strength of love. Hanumān takes leave of the princess, and her tears and benedictions accompany his departure.

Eager for fight, Hanumān destroys the grove of asokas, only sparing the clumps where the captive lived, and provokes the battle for which he longs. Frightened, the Rākshasīs question Sītā, who feigns surprise Some of them run to their master to relate this strange occurrence, and, denouncing the protection that the destroyer of the gardens seemed to extend to Sītā, they excite him to punish the guilty one who had violated the rules in force by daring to speak to the prisoner.

But Hanumān cuts in pieces the armies sent against him by the monarch of the Rākshasas; he kills his best generals; he spares not even Aksha, the handsome heir-apparent, the beloved son of Rāvana. At last, hit by an arrow of Brahma's shot by the magician Indrajit, the most redoubtable of Rāvana's children, he is captured and led before the black sovereign. The laws forbid the punishment of an ambassador; Hanumān cannot therefore be killed.

The identification of the Aboriginal with the Monkey is here made complete. The poet imagines that Rāvana orders the tail of the man of the woods to be set on fire. From this strange and even ridiculous situation, there yet springs a poetical beauty. From the grove of asokas Sītā sees him who for her sake was hazarding his life; she sees him, surrounded by flames, dragged ignominiously through the city by the Rākshasas. Overwhelmed with grief, the pious young wife, seeking again in prayer a remedy for this new misfortune, thus addresses the god of Fire:—

"If I have acted with signal obedience towards my revered husband," says she; "if I have cultivated penitence; if I have never failed in faithfulness towards my husband; Fire, burn not Hanumān!

"If in this intelligent quadrumane there is any kindly feeling towards me, or if there is any happiness in store for me, Fire, burn not Hanumān!

[1] Ibid, chap xxxvii.

"If this quadrumane of upright mind has seen that my conduct is wise, and that my heart pursues the path of virtue, Fire, burn not Hanumān!"

And the Fire, encircling the princess with its purest flame, seems to answer. "I will not burn Hanumān!"[1] The man of the woods does not suffer, and guesses to whom he owes his deliverance. Suddenly he bursts asunder his bonds, kills his guards, and the son of the Wind, as he hovers over Lankā, spreads fire and death on all sides.

In a moment of cruel anguish Hanumān reproaches himself for his precipitate haste Suppose the flames should reach Sītā, suppose he should cause the death of her whom he wished to defend and avenge! But the spirits of the sky praise his courage, exclaiming: "Look! the city of Lankā is burnt down, with its arcades, its palaces, and its ramparts; but the fire has respected the Janakide!"[2]

On her side Sītā fears no longer for Rāma's messenger. A Rākshasī, named Saramā, who is devoted to the captive, has told her of Hanumān's deliverance and of his vengeance. Everything is in flames except the grove inhabited by the Videhan. Saramā repeats to her the discourses of the sages, who predict in these events the future triumph of the wronged wife. Hanumān now bids a final farewell to the unhappy princess, though she implores him to remain; so much does she dread to see her last hopes vanish with him. But he springs up into the air and goes to rejoin his companions.

The joyous arrival of the Vānaras announces to the allied princes that Sītā has been found.

"Where is Sītā living? How does the queen's conduct stand with regard to myself?"[3] such are the first questions addressed them by Rāma. Hanumān repeats the queen's message to him and describes her faithfulness, her piety, and her grief; and places in his hands the clasp that had bound the tresses of his young wife; the same clasp which Dasaratha himself had, on his children's wedding-day, placed upon the bride's radiant brow.

With deep emotion Rāma recognized the pearl; he pressed it to his heart, and Lakshmana's tears mingled with those

[1] Ibid., chap xlix.
[2] Ibid., chap li.
[3] Ibid., chap. lxviii.

of his brother. " This rare pearl," said Rāma, " had been long worn by my beloved ; on seeing it again to-day, I seem to see Sītā herself . .

. . . . . .

" Sītā will live long if she can endure her present life for one more month ; without her, O my handsome monkey, I should not know how to live a single instant ; there, such is my thought !

" Take me, Hanumān, to the place where my beloved is , after the news that thou hast brought me, I cannot stay here a moment longer

" Timorous, forsaken, how can my charming wife live among those terrible demons, the very sight of whom must overpower her ? . . .

. . . . . .

" Hanumān, what said Sītā ? Repeat her words faithfully. I am like that sick man whom one remedy alone can restore to life." [1]

Hanumān relates his interview with the prisoner

Rāma listens with delight. But for all the happiness brought him by Hanumān, what can he, an exile, and in misery, give him in return ? Then, extending his arms to the general, he says: " This embrace is all my riches, son of the Wind ; receive then this gift, suitable to the present time and to my condition " [2]

The army immediately began its march, and arrived in due time at the seashore.

The solemn voice of the Ocean thundered. The waves, lifted up by the hurricane, rolled along in eddies of foam, bearing in their mad career the monsters of the deep. The sparkling stars were reflected in spangles in the waters, and the sea and sky, kissed by the vague and milky light of the queen of Night, blended together in the horizon and appeared to form but one sea or one sky.

Rāma contemplated that impressive, melancholy scene, clearing in thought the bounds of space, seeking his darling wife.

" Wind," said he, " breathe upon me, blowing from where

[1] Ibid., chap. lxx.
[2] Ibid., chap. lxvii.

my beloved is; touch me with the same breath which has touched her." [1]

In Lankā there were assemblies and deliberations.

Rāvana's mother, the queen Nikashā, had witnessed the disasters that had befallen the island on Hanumān's arrival. For a long time she had blamed her son's acts of violence; she had suffered, as from poison, from the abduction of Sītā, for she had foreseen its consequences. Already was the punishment beginning She addressed herself to the only man who could understand how much the customs of that voluptuous and sanguinary court wounded her pure and generous instincts; namely, to her son Vibhīshana, of the upright soul.

"Hanumān," said she to him, with sad conviction, "Hanumān was sent here by the son of Raghu, versed in statecraft, and bent on the task of seeking his well-beloved spouse; the messenger has seen the captive. This, my son, is the great and perilous rock in the way of the monarch of the Rākshasas; thou knowest, prince of great foresight, what, for certain, must hence result in the future.

"For, O thou who knowest what duty means, a pleasure, however great, enjoyed at the sacrifice of duty, never fails in bringing a dreadful calamity on a man and in augmenting the joy of his enemies." [2]

. . . . . .

She guesses how the abduction of Sītā must have heaped up grief and anger together in the heart of the insulted husband. This Rāma, whom she believes to be Death itself incarnate upon earth, she feels to be superior to her son.

"Let Vibhīshana," she says, "repair to the sovereign plunged in the darkness of sensuality, and make the pure light of truth shine before his eyes What a feeble woman and a mother cannot accomplish, that let a man of good heart and a brother undertake. Send back Sītā free."

The prince, bowing down, clasps the feet of the queen-mother, salutes her with the anjali, and repairs to the council of ministers.

Meanwhile, Rāvana was asking his councillors to enlighten

[1] Ibid., chap. lxxv.
[2] Ibid., chap. lxxvi

him on the present situation, due to the abduction. He gave them full liberty to blame him, knowing well that they would not dare to make use of the privilege granted to them by his royal goodwill.

And indeed, they all vied with each other in flattering the headstrong monarch and exciting him to extreme measures. At last, seizing their arms in violent haste and shouting cries of death, they are on the point of rushing from the council hall, when a calm and solemn voice stops them:—Let Sītā be given back to the virtuous prince whom Rāvana had unjustly attacked! Let her be given back before the ruins of Lankā attest the avenging triumph of Rāma, and before the sun shines on the shameful defeat of the Rākshasas! Let her be given back before Rāvana atones for his senseless acts with his blood!

Such were the counsels Vibhīshana (for it was his voice) gave to his brother.

"In order to save thy capital with its Rākshasas and thy own life exposed to extreme peril, follow the wise and true advice of thy friends; restore the Mithilan to the Dasarathide.

. . . . . .

"Control anger, for by it are destroyed both glory and race; cultivate virtue which adds a new lustre to the beauty of glory; act so that we may live, we, our parents, our sons, and restore the Mithilan to her Dasarathide." [1]

Useless endeavour! In vain Vibhīshana persists, and declares his intention of quitting, not without some regret, that den of iniquity, and of going to breathe a purer atmosphere in Rāma's presence The king, furious at this resistance, outrages the noble prince, and with his foot spurns him from his throne of gold. But the injured prince, rising with dignity, said to Rāvana "If any other but thyself had spoken these words, spirit of darkness, he would have instantly ceased to live. Avaunt! shame of thy race!" [2]

Followed by four ministers, he darts up into the air, and, hovering over Lankā, says once more to the monarch:—

"The true friend of kings is he who, faithful to his duty,

[1] Ibid., chap lxxx

[2] Ibid, chap. lxxxviii.

observant of what is good or evil for his master, advises, though it may displease him, yet would save him ! "

He adjures him for the last time to arrest his course along the fatal declivity down which he is being drawn, before the precipice in which it terminates will have engulfed him; and, after relating to the queen-mother the result of the mission confided to him by her, he repairs to Rāma's camp.

Rāma, repelling Sugrīva's suspicions, receives Vibhīshana affectionately, for he comes to him in the guise of friendship. He repeats a noble adage which a sage had lately sung :—

" Man ought to sacrifice his own life to save that of a suppliant enemy "

Rāma remembers the oath sworn by him on his admittance into the military caste of the Kshattriyas.[1]

Does not that oath contain the germ of that institution which sprang into life thousands of years afterwards in Europe, and which has remained as the most glorious remembrance of the Middle Ages ?

Then was prepared a change of dynasty for ancient Ceylon ; Rāma prayed Lakshmana to consecrate Vibhīshana with water from the sea, as monarch of the Rākshasas and king of Lankā.

For three nights did Rāma perform rigorous penance that the Ocean, by his grace, might deign to grant a passage for his army But the Ocean turned a deaf ear to his prayers. The Kshattriya, irritated, threw it into dire confusion with his arrows, whose glowing tracks furrowed the surging waves. The flames ran along the water, spreading far and wide, till the Ocean—transformed into one sheet of fire and shaken to its foundations by the hurtling of the divine weapons, consented, not indeed to allow itself to be surmounted by a bridge, but to allow the erection across it of a mole Nala, one of Sugrīva's generals, superintended the construction. Rocks, summits of mountains, clumps of trees, formed that enormous mole whose remains the Hindus of the present day recognize and venerate in the sand banks that nearly join the island of Ceylon to the continent, and which they call Rāma's bridge.

[1] Ibid., chap. xci.

In the space of one month the army was thus able to cross the Ocean.[1]

The disquieting reports brought back by the spies sent by Rāvana in the direction of the enemy's army do not unsettle him in his resolutions. Even if heaven itself were to dispute his possession of Sītā, he would still keep her.

A bright idea suddenly dawns upon him. If her husband were killed the captive might perhaps consent to a second marriage. So he announces to Sītā the death of Rāma and the defeat of the Vānaras, and causes a man's head and a bow to be rolled down at her feet. In them the young wife recognizes the face and the weapon of her husband! Her first cry of grief is torn from her by a bitter remembrance, she curses Kaikeyī and faints

When she recovers, she kisses the pale face she thinks is Rāma's Her husband is dead; and oh! poignant thought, he has died for her! Kausalyā would never again see him who has died far away from a mother:—

"Why dost thou not turn thine eyes upon me, Rāma? Why dost thou not say one word to me, to me, whom when a child, thou didst take for thy spouse, and who has always accompanied thy footsteps?

"Remember this word, 'I shall love thee!' that fell from thy lips, when thou didst take my hand before the altar, take me, thy desolate wife, take me along with thyself"[2]

Perhaps her husband's body was even then being dragged along by Rākshasas, abandoned to their insults and deprived of funeral honours!

Alone would Lakshmana return from the long exile and slay Kausalyā with the fatal news. May Rāvana kill the wife on her husband's corpse, and thus reunite them in death!

While she was thus expressing her grief, there was trouble in Lankā, and Rāvana, agitated by the gloomy news that was circulating through the city, hastily leaves his captive The head and the bow disappear with him

The Rākshasī, Saramā, hidden in a lonely corner of the

[1] Adam's Bridge, thus named by the Portuguese who imagined that the Garden of Eden was situated in the island of Ceylon and that Adam, loving to walk with Eve as far as the Malabar coast, had thrown this mole between the island and the continent

[2] *Yuddhakānda*, chap viii

grove, has seen and heard everything. She loved Sītā, and was continually whispering kind, consoling words in her ear. She had shortly before told her of Hanumān's escape, and now she went so far as to be reckless of her own life, and of the danger that she might bring on her family. One word might kill her and ruin her own people, but that word will reassure Sītā, and therefore it must be spoken.

She advances and speaks: she knows why Rāvana went away, evincing such deep emotion. Rāma, Rāma who is alive, for Sītā has been deceived by an illusion only, Rāma is approaching, and to-morrow he will attack Lankā. And even while she is speaking, the noise of an unusual tumult resounds through the grove.

"Listen!" said Saramā, "the fearful beating of the kettle-drums calling the brave warriors to arms and splitting the heart of the coward, rends the air with its boom, like the rushing sound of tempest-laden clouds Lo! the elephants, already mad for battle, are being harnessed, and the horses yoked to the chariots; I hear the foot soldiers hastily donning their cuirasses, and rushing hither and thither; everywhere the royal highway is blocked with impetuous armies, like the sea with its great billows, rushing along with irresistible fury Look at these many-coloured rays of light glancing all round in sheafs from shields and coats of armour and flashing javelins; one might almost say that it is a conflagration, self-lighted, during the burning hot season, devouring the forests.

"Listen to the sound of bells and to the rumbling of chariots! Listen to the neighing of horses and the flourish of martial music!

"This confused din is made by the Rākshasas who, carrying aloft arrows and weapons, follow the monarch of the Jātavas[1]

"May Laksmī protect thee, she who heals all troubles! This terror with which thou seest the Rākshasas stricken, O fair lady of the charming eyes, like the petals of the lotus, it is Rāma who inspires it, as the god, who wields the thunder, strikes terror into the Daityas."[2] Joy revived in Sītā's wounded heart. Saramā continued to console her, longing to prove still more her love and devotion. Did the princess wish

[1] Another name for the Rākshasas

[2] *Yuddhakānda*, chap ix.

her to go to Rāma? One word and she would go! But Sītā, assured that her husband lived, prefers to be informed of what was then being plotted in Rāvana's councils.

The Rākshasī flew away, and on her quick return Sītā tenderly kissed her, thanking her for a friendship which even the fear of death had not been able to destroy.

"All this world, alas! is influenced by self-interest in its affections; but thou, O illustrious lady, thou lovest from disinterested motives. With the blood of a noble race, and the virtues of a soul ever pure, thou art in the habitation of the Rākshasas as the Ganges is upon earth—an agent for the cleansing of created beings." [1]

Saramā gave her an account of her mission. How the queen-mother had implored Rāvana to give up his captive, and how the most venerable of his ministers had counselled him to receive Rāma with honour and give Sītā back to him. "But," continued the Rākshasī, "in vain have these repeated warnings been given him by his mother and his oldest councillor; he has no wish to restore thee to liberty, any more than the miser has to give up his gold. Thy ravisher, Janakide, cannot bring himself to restore thee without a combat."

While she was assuring Sītā of the indubitable issue of the fight, an impetuous wind carried into Lankā the warlike tumult raging in Rāma's camp The beating of drums, the blowing of conch-shells were echoed from mountain to mountain For Sītā, this meant deliverance, but for the Rākshasas, death

Rāvana was disconcerted; and the people trembled, for he was upholding a bad cause. The entire race of Rākshasas were about to expiate the crime of their chief.

Yes, the people were in terror It rained blood over the city; statues had been seen to laugh and weep, tanks and lakes, hitherto stagnant, now resounded with dull roarings; war-chariots rolled on by themselves, horses wept, and flags drooped, tarnished and torn. Crows, jackals, and vultures cried aloud, and before them stood a black woman with white teeth The order of nature was reversed, even in the manner of the birth of animals. The Sārikās,[2] the familiar house-

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap x

[2] *Gracula religiosa*.

birds, murmured lugubrious notes. A black creature, quite bald, stalked with greedy looks from house to house; it was Death marking his victims. The sun's rays burnt up the earth, the wind blew from the opposite side to where Rāvana was. The birds of prey were rejoicing at the prospect of a horrible meal. And it was on account of a woman that so many calamities were threatening Lankā! The ancient prophecy was about to be fulfilled, that, for the sake of a woman, the city of Giants would be destroyed. But Rāvana persisted still and put the town into a condition to sustain a siege.

One last measure was attempted by Angada in person, in the name of Rāma. Rāma, to use his own noble expression, had the power to delay the punishment that hung over the head of his enemy, and he summoned him for the last time either to send back Sītā or else to measure his prowess against his, singly. The response of the king of Lankā was to violate the dignity of the ambassador, and to put his life in danger. But Angada, escaping from his guard, left Rāvana's palace, but not before he had avenged himself.

Then began those strange fights of giants in which the Rākshasas with their flaming clubs, their lances, iron pikes, axes, bows and javelins, repulsed the attacks of the Vānaras, to whom the poet, faithful to the characteristics that tradition attributed to them, assigned as weapons, claws and teeth, the sturdy trunks of trees, rocks, and mountain summits

But the magician, Indrajit, making himself invisible, smites Rāma and Lakshmana with his divine weapons. Harassed by that bodiless enemy, the two heroes, after a desperate struggle, fall to the ground, bathed in their own blood. Life appears to have departed from them. In transports of joy at the news of his son's triumph, Rāvana orders the old Trijatā to place Sītā on the chariot Pushpaka, and conduct her to the enemy's camp. Let her there see those lying dead for whom she had waited; the sight might make her die of grief, or else, released from her vows, she might now throw herself into the arms of a new husband.

A few moments afterwards and Sītā was gazing upon the ruin of her last hopes. She saw them destroyed before her alliance with Rāma could be sealed by the birth of sweet children clasped to her bosom, and before the diadem could be placed on her brow. The titles of mother, of queen. now

give place to that of widow! "It is not so much for the death of my husband that I shed these tears; it is not so much for Lakshmana's death, nor for myself, nor even for my mother herself, but for Kausalyā, my austere and pious mother-in-law. Perhaps at this moment she thinks that her son is about to return at the expiry of the time imposed by his vow. 'When shall I see,' she says, 'when shall I see my Kakutshid, accompanied by his spouse and Lakshmana?'"[1]

But Trijatā, who, as we have seen, had been for a long time attracted by the virtues of the royal captive, could not endure the sight of her grief.

"Queen, do not give way to despair," she says to her, "for thy husband lives."

If Rāma were dead, would his allies be so eager to fight? Would Rāvana himself send the widow of their chief to the assailants? Besides, on the pale faces of the two brothers there beamed the light of beauty, that divine ray of life! Death does not leave such a charm in his victims "Well may it be so," replied Sītā; but the dart of sorrow had penetrated her heart, when back to her prison, all her former grief revived without the hope which had helped her to bear it

Rāma was the first to recover from his swoon, and gazed on his brother, lying motionless as if in death Ah, what matters Sītā to him now? Everywhere he could find both wife and children, but who could replace a brother? And Sumitrā, whom he loved equally with Kausalyā with filial love, what could he say to her when he returned alone to Ayodhyā? What could *he* say, for whom Lakshmana had died? Quite unmanned, he prayed his allies to return to their country; as for him, he would bow to his fate.

Sugrīva commanded some of his warriors to carry the two brothers to the Kishkindhyā cavern, and swore to kill Rāvana and bring back the ravished wife to Rāma; and while they were seeking means to heal their wounds, the wind murmured into Rāma's ear the revelation of the divine mystery of his birth.

Lightning furrowed the heavens, trees were uprooted and flung into the sea, the crash of the tempest shook the

[1] *Sundarakānda*, chap. xxiii.

mountains, and made the Ocean roar. At the voice of Garuda, the bird that serves Vishnu as a mount, the bird that is the destroyer of reptiles, the serpents that Indrajit had entwined round the two brothers, left them and entered once more into the earth. Rāma, awakening as if from a dream, remembered no longer the words that the wind had revealed to him. They were to be recalled to him on Rāvana's day of punishment. News of the safety of the two brothers spreads joy amongst the Vānaras and terror amongst the Rākshasas.

The best generals of Lankā now bite the dust Rāvana, struck with the might of his adversaries, judges them now worthy of a personal combat. He prepares to leave his palace . . . But into the council chamber enters the royal spouse, Mandodarī, the fair-complexioned favourite She leads her son Mālyavat by the hand, and is attended by ministers, by women of every age, and by Rākshasas, some carrying the *jharjhara* (drums), whose bells frighten serpents away, others bamboos, which scatter crowds. Escorted by warriors with weapons in their hands, but anxiety in their hearts, Mandodarī advances towards Rāvana.

The monarch, rising eagerly, runs towards her, and after embracing her reseats himself upon the throne, while his altered features and eyes, red with weeping, testify to his grief, and perhaps to his remorse

He is astonished at seeing his wife come to him with such an imposing retinue, and begs her to tell him the reason why, and the queen draws from her wifely and motherly love sufficient strength to allow her to speak

She has learnt of the repeated disasters to the Rākshasa armies, she knows that Rāvana is preparing to fight in person, and that is the reason why she has come to address words of peace to him. Let him not forget this—that not a mere mortal was this Rāma, who had annihilated fourteen thousand Rākshasas in the Janasthāna! Not a mere mortal was this Rāma, who had immolated Khara! Not a mere mortal, by whom Bāli had been killed.

Pious and just, he has been unjustly attacked by Rāvana Let Sītā be given back to her husband, and let the noble Vibhīshana, cruelly misjudged by Rāvana, act as a mediator between the two monarchs. Rāma, *who loves even his enemies*,

will receive graciously the homage of him who has wronged him. In the name of the safety of the kingdom and of himself, may Rāvana yield to the counsel given to him!

Burning sighs escape from Rāvana's heavy heart. He looks, one after another, at the anxious faces surrounding him, and taking the hand of the courageous princess, replies with a look of gentleness not usual with him on such an occasion:—

"The words urged by thy desire for my good, beloved queen, have taken possession of my soul, without causing it any vexation." But how could he, the conqueror of the gods, humble himself before the man whom he had called the protected ally of a monkey!

"I would rather break, goddess, than bend before whoever it may be!

Tenderly reassuring Mandodarī, he embraces her and persuades her to return to the gynæceum to the queen-mother Crowned with a tiara, he springs on his war-chariot, shaded by a white parasol reflecting the colours of mother-of-pearl and supported on golden rods. Sugrīva, Hanumān, Nila, and Lakshmana fight in turn with him At last Rāma comes face to face with the man who had robbed him of all his happiness, and outraged his conjugal honour He shatters with his darts Rāvana's chariot, he wounds the monarch himself, who faints He has him now in his own power!

With a flying arrow he shoots off the aigrette which ornamented his diadem and says:—

"Thou hast carried out a great, an arduous exploit; for thy arm has killed my most valiant warriors; therefore I think that thou must be fatigued, and this is why my arrows do not send thee on the road to death." [1]

During the splendid period of Western chivalry, did the generous courtesy of a victor ever inspire him with a more merciful speech to the vanquished?

Rāvana returns to his palace dismayed, stricken with fear; he remembers the wise warnings of Vibhīshana, and repentance takes possession of his soul; yet his dauntless courage excites him more than ever to continue to fight.

His brother, Kumbhakarna, giant of the half-year's sleep,

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. xxxvi.

awakes by command of Rāvana, and repairs to the field of battle. He has before blamed the conduct of his brother, whom he had apprised of Rāma's divine birth ; nevertheless, he goes courageously to meet the destiny awaiting him. He meets, fighting, the death that he had foreseen, and that the four sons of Rāvana and two of their uncles would seek after him. A formidable defender of the king of Lankā, however, yet remains in Indrajit, "the conqueror of Indra," and one who has already imperilled the lives of Rāma and Lakshmana. A second time he lays them low, and makes great carnage of their allies. Restored to life by the panacea brought by Hanumān, with the summit and all of the mountain on which the herb grew, the princes and their allies were once more ready for the struggle, and Sugrīva orders the assault of Lankā The besiegers set fire to the town. Under the ruddy light of the flames the battle begins, and the Vānaras seem likely to win . . . But Indrajit, watchful, compels them to retire. Thirsting for vengeance, he returns to the charge. By his magic art he evokes a phantom of Sītā and places it on his chariot. The young woman is represented in the act of weeping, and over her beautiful head Indrajit is holding a sword

In vain Hanumān, his eyes bathed in tears, reminds Indrajit of the punishment reserved in hell for the murderer of a woman. The assassination of the false Sītā was the answer to the threat. Excited by a fierce desire to avenge themselves, the Vānaras fight furiously. The enemy is put to flight and Hanumān announces to Rāma the murder of Sītā.

Rāma swoons, and Lakshmana running to him seizes him in his arms. Vibhīshana reassures the afflicted ones. He is aware of his nephew's magic art, and he knows also that Rāvana would never have permitted the murder of the beautiful captive.

What had hitherto been the source of strength to Indrajit was the sacrifice offered by him to Fire, before entering the fight. At this very moment, under the sombre arches of the nyagrodha, the fig-tree of the pagodas, upon the Nikumbhīlā (the place where the victims were burnt while the Rākshasas laid nosegays of flowers, red garments, weapons a double ladle of black iron), Indrajit was cutting the throat of a black he-goat and pouring its blood into the flames. Let Lakshmana

follow the counsel of Vibhīshana and interrupt the sacrifice; and the magician would be vulnerable!

On Lakshmana's return from the struggle, the besiegers are delivered from their most cruel enemy, and Rāma, holding the young hero to his heart lovingly touches the wounds furrowed by Indrajit's arrows all over his body.

Rāvana has learnt of the death of the dearest of his defenders. Heartstricken, he was on the point of rushing to the battle-field, but before killing Rāma and Lakshmana he would first avenge himself by the death of her they were hoping to save Naked sword in hand, he flies to the asoka grove.

Sītā understands that her last hour is at hand; perhaps her friends have preceded her to the grave.

"Shame to Mantharā," she says, "that vicious hunchback, image of sin, and the cause of such profound grief for Kausalyā."[1]

But one of Rāvana's councillors severely reproaches his master for wishing to dishonour himself by murdering a woman The king gazes fixedly at his trembling captive, and, as he watches her, looking so beautiful, he feels his anger vanishing—and he retires to his palace.

Rāma mows down the flower of the Rākshasa warriors Sītā is already avenged, and the groans of widows fill that Lankā where the exiled wife is suffering. The Rākshasīs, thus deprived of husbands, sons, other relations, curse Sūrpanakhā, whose mad passion has brought so many evils on their island; and bitterly blame Rāvana for his pride and obstinacy

The last battle has now begun After a desperate struggle between Rāvana and the princes of Ayodhyā, Lakshmana falls, mortally wounded. Rāma feels faint at heart, and tears rise to his eyes. But this is the moment, not for giving way, but for making Rāvana dearly pay for Lakshmana's sufferings He curbs his feelings, and continues the fight. But when Rāvana, sorely needing repose, quits the field of battle for a short while, it is then that Rāma weeps for his brother

Again does Hanumān's devotion save Lakshmana; there he comes again! bearing the mountain on which grows the

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap lxxii

herb of the panacea, by applying which, the arrows could be extracted.

He has seen Bharata on his journey, and apprised him of the events that detained Rāma before Lankā. He repeats the words of love and regret sent by the young prince to his brothers, and he has heard him curse both himself and his mother, as being the cause of the misfortunes that the exile of Rāma had brought about Rāma, with delirious joy, draws to his bosom the brother now restored to him, and bedewing him with kisses, says :—

" Come ! come ! . . . Hero, I see thee, oh ! what happiness ! saved from death ! " [1] But when he hears his brother declare that the loss of his friend had stopped him in the accomplishment of his task, Lakshmana, in a voice still weak, reproaches him for his weakness. " Fidelity to one's promise is the seal of greatness " [2]

Once more the two champions meet. Both are mounted on celestial vehicles, for Indra himself has, to equalize the chances of the battle, sent Rāma his chariot, driven by his charioteer, Mātali. Rāma's wrath convulses nature. Earth trembles Thunder-claps burst. Ocean roars. And Rāvana himself feels terrified. As in the Iliad, the gods and the Titans of India renew their former quarrels " Victory to thee, Dasagrīva,[3] cry the Daityas to the Rākshasas. " Victory to thee, Rāma ! " reply the chorus of the Immortals. And in heaven, as on earth, the two principles of Good and Evil enter into struggle.

The issue of the duel at first seems undecided. The adversaries, both wounded, display equal courage, equal impetuosity. At last, Rāma, breaking into loud laughter, expresses in sarcastic language the indignation which had long been rising in his breast

" As a punishment for having dragged to this place from Janasthāna my spouse against her will, thou shalt lose thy life, O vilest of Rākshasas. Taking advantage of the moment when I had left my Videhan, thou didst carry her away by force, disregarding her character of an anchorite, and thou thinkest to thyself : ' I am a hero ! '

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. lxxxiii.
[2] Ibid., chap. lxxxv.
[3] Ibid . chap. lxxxvii.

"Thou displayest thy courage on defenceless women, ravisher of the wives of other men, and while committing the action of a coward, thou thinkest: 'I am a hero! ...

"Truly, thy action well becomes a hero, who is the brother of the god dispensing riches,[1] and is a monarch both happy and powerful through riches; such an action is great and glorious, and thou mayest well boast of it! Because Rākshasas, weak and trembling, honour thee like a god, in thy pride and haughtiness thou thinkest to thyself: 'I am a hero!'..

"I cannot sleep day or night, O thou night-prowler, prowling after criminal designs; no! Rāvana, I taste no repose till I have torn thee up by the roots. These many months have I passed, ceaselessly planning thy death; thou hast deserved to die, and death shall open for thee on this very spot the door of departure from this life!...

. . . . . .

"I know thee, O madman, and still thou sayest to thyself, 'I am a hero!' thou hast no shame left in thee, for like a thief thou didst steal Sītā! If thou hadst forcibly attempted to take Sītā in my presence, I would have slain thee with my arrows, and sent thee to the abode of the dead, to visit thy brother Khara! But happily, madman, thou hast offered thyself before the light of my eyes, now will my keen darts send thee to where Yama dwells This very day the carrion-devouring beasts of prey will drag about thy head with its glittering eardrops, thy head pierced by my arrows and lying in the dust of the battlefield.

"Lying dead upon the earth, the vultures in their flight will swoop down upon thy chest, and, Rāvana, joyfully drink the blood flowing from the wounds made by my javelins and arrows ... How greedily there, from thy body, pierced by my darts, will the birds of heaven pull out thy trailing entrails, as Garuda pulls about trailing serpents"[2]

The violence of his bitter wrath redoubles his courage, and he discharges a shower of arrows upon his adversary.

The great struggle lasted for seven days and seven nights

[1] Rāvana was half-brother to Kuvera, the god of riches.

[2] *Yuddhakānda*, chap lxxxviii. Garuda, a demi-god having the head and wings of a bird, and serving as a steed to Vishnu. After a quarrel between his mother, Vinatā, and his mother-in-law, Kadru, mother of serpents, both wives of Kasyapa, he became the most redoubtable enemy of reptiles.

"I must conquer," Rāma said to himself. "I must die," Rāvana said to himself Yes, he must die. On the night of the seventh day, struck to the heart by one of Rāma's arrows, the black sovereign welters in his blood; and, as the Rākshasas flee away and the Vānaras utter cries of triumph, all the heavens join in one immense acclamation, "Victory!"

Rāma's chariot was flooded with showers of flowers. The Gandharvas and the Apsaras descended to the earth, and while the heavenly minstrels extolled the victor, celestial dancers displayed before him their enchanting graces in aerial dances.

The sun shot his most dazzling rays in golden sheaves. The earth, bathed in pure, genial light, reposed in serene radiant beauty, for the evil forces that had lately troubled her were now annihilated. It was the most splendid victory that civilization had until then won over barbarism.

At the prayer of Vibhīshana Rāma gave orders for the funeral of his most cruel enemy. "Victory" he says, "blots out enmities; war ended brings back peace. Let his obsequies be celebrated; this is as much my wish as thine." [1]

Such had not been the first impulse of Achilles, when the corpse of the just and loyal Hector lay before him.

The women of the gynæceum rush in a crowd to the field of battle. What a gloomy scene! The sinister call of the jackal, the mournful cry of the vulture, the melancholy note of the heron, the croaking of the raven, answer the plaintive sighs of the wives of Rāvana. Upon the ground, now transformed into a "mire of blood", they had to tread upon the corpses of the Rākshasas before they could reach their husband's corpse.

"Alas, my noble husband! Alas, my protector!" they sobbed over it. "The conqueror of the gods is then actually struck down, struck down by the hand of a man

"Blinded by the possession of power, thou didst shut thy ear to thy true friends, who only spoke for thy good, and thou hast dragged us with thee in thy fall."

Why had he not yielded to the counsels of Vibhīshana, of his relations and friends? Why had he not reunited the husband and wife whom he had torn the one from the other?

[1] *Yuddhakânda*, chap. xciii.

But wherefore accuse him? Destiny alone was guilty of it. Fatality! the supreme word in the pantheistic cultus!

Mandodarī, the blonde favourite, she also was there. Hitherto she had remained in silence by the corpse of her husband, gazing sadly on it Suddenly she spoke. So, her presentiments were well founded, when she perceived more than an ordinary human being in Rāma. Vishnu, incarnate upon earth, alone could have conquered the invincible Rāvana

"'Make peace with the Raghuide! I used to say'; but thou didst not listen to my words therefore comes his triumph to-day. Thou wast madly in love with Sītā, monarch of the Rākshasas. hence the loss of thy empire, of thy life, and loss to myself" [1]

What a heart-rending confession of her sufferings! What bitterness and truth in this lamentation.—

"There were women equal to her in beauty; there were women even superior to her in it; but, become the slave of love, thou didst not see this. She is not superior to me, neither by birth, nor by beauty, nor by distinction in good breeding, but in thy madness thou didst not see this . .

"The Mithilan will now joyously follow Rāma, whilst I, unhappy, sink into an appalling sea of troubles"

She now knows misfortune, she whose superhuman birth and rank ought to have preserved her from it:

"My father was king of the Dānavas, my husband monarch of the Rākshasas, and I had Satrunirjetri for my son, good cause had I to be proud! But to-day my family is no more; I have lost my protector in thee . Does he deserve so much regret, he who has died for the sake of the rival whom he preferred to myself?

"There is no need for me, I know, to shed tears for thee, renowned for courage and strength, but my womanly nature inclines my heart to pity.

"Thou hast entered upon the path thou didst trace out for thyself, when thou couldst have chosen a better one; I deplore my condition, for my separation from thee plunges me into profound grief.

"Royally vested in thy yellow robe, thy members stretched

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. xcv.

limp on the earth, why liest thou there, like a dark cloud surrounded by an orange sky ? "

Why does he not speak to her who was grieving, to her who felt the blood of kings and of gods flowing in her veins ?

" Rise, rise ! Why art thou lying there ? why dost thou not say one word to me, thy darling wife ? Honour in me, thou demon of the night, thou of the long arms, the mother of thy son ! "

She murmurs yet a few more lamentations ; then her beautiful head falls back, cold and colourless ; the queen has fainted.

The women of the gynæceum raise her up and revive her.

" Queen," they said, " he did not understand the uncertain march of human affairs , every condition of life brings its misfortune ; accursed be this unstable splendour of kings ! '

And after that bitter reflection on the vanity of this world's greatness, every voice is choked in one long sob.

Rāma has been contemplating this scene. " Attend to thy brother's funeral," he says to Vibhīshana, " and let some consolation be given to these crowds of women."

After the official coronation of Vibhīshana, Rāma charges Hanumān with a mission Let him go to Lankā and announce to Sītā that her husband is alive and her abductor—dead.

Sītā was yet ignorant of everything. Hanumān approaches, and makes obeisance to her .—

" Mithilan, Rāma is in good health and Sugrīva and Lakshmana are with him ; this conqueror of enemies has slain his rival, and now that the war has ended so happily, he salutes thee through me " [1]

What news for the exiled wife, so long tortured by the alternative of dishonour or death ! for the loving and loved wife, despairing perhaps never to see him to whom she had inviolably plighted her troth ! She starts up. Lately she had fought against her grief, which had torn piercing cries from her harrowed soul. Now her happiness crushes her, and leaves her motionless and dumb. Is it not the characteristic of human nature to be stronger in grief than in joy ?

When the young wife was again able to articulate words,

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. xcviii

Hanumān, still inclined before her, with his hands joined in the form of a cup above his temples for the *anjali* salutation, implores one favour of the princess. He had suffered cruelly when from the top of the asoka-tree he looked down upon the captive. He had seen her exposed to the insults of her guard May he be allowed to satiate the longing for vengeance which has rankled in his heart ever since that heart-rending spectacle? Through physical tortures inflicted upon them, the black women should atone for the moral sufferings with which they had overwhelmed the gentle victim

Sītā is silent for a moment; then, in gracious and laughing accents she prays Hanumān to spare the women who had been but the blind instruments of a dreaded master, "servants bound to obey, moved by the will of another."

It is true she had suffered, but ought she not to atone for faults formerly committed? Misfortune is a purification. Besides, destiny has ruled it so. And, with ineffable commiseration and heavenly gentleness she adds:—

"Feeble myself, I know how to pardon the feeble servants of another."

"Sītā, the noble spouse of Rāma," said Hanumān, "speaks as befits her. Give me thy commandments, queen, and I then return to where the Raghuide waits for me."

To see Rāma was Sītā's only wish, and such too was her only answer. The son of the Wind returned to Rāma, recounted to him the interview with Sītā, and delivered her message. The prince is silent; his face wears a severe expression, yet tears dim his eyes, and deep sighs heave his chest. After a long silence he addresses Vibhīshana:—

"Arrange to bring here the princess of Mithilā, Sītā, my Videhan, as soon as she has bathed her head, adorned herself with celestial rouge, and arrayed herself in celestial robes"[1]

Vibhīshana transmits Rāma's desire to Sītā. What! postpone their reunion for such a frivolous reason? A few steps only separate those whom the Ocean had but lately separated, and yet were they not enfolded in each other's arms! Sītā, dressed as she was in the soiled garments of her captivity, wants to run to him whom she is dying to see,

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. xcix.

but Vibhīshana reminds her of Rāma's express command. She yields and allows herself to be arrayed.

The Vānaras soon saw a sumptuous litter advancing towards the camp, and pressed forward on the route of the procession. It was a moment of immense curiosity. "What beauty must not this Videhan have!" said they among themselves. "What is this pearl amongst women for whose sake the whole monkey-world was placed in such great peril?

"She for whom was killed such a king as Rāvana, the Rākshasa monarch, and for whom was placed across the waves of the deep sea a mole one hundred yojanas long!"

Vibhīshana approaches Rāma. "I have brought her," he says joyfully. But Rāma turns away and remains silent.

Scarcely had he learnt of her arrival, of her who had for so long lived in the house of a Rākshasa, than three emotions at the same moment overwhelmed him: joy, anger, sadness.

He orders the litter to advance. A great clamour rises from the crowd, they must see; they had waited; but Vibhīshana has the people driven back Rāma is indignant. He blames the new king of the Rākshasas for driving back from him those whom he looks upon as members of his own family.

Sītā has recognized her husband's voice, and her soul trembles within her. Is this, then, the transport, the intoxicating joy, that he feels at this so much longed-for reunion? She is there, near to him, the wife for whom he had wept, and yet his first word was not for her; the spectators of the scene were alone the object of his solicitude.

"Then" with fine penetration adds the poet, "the Janakide looked at her husband, reflected, and woman-like, she suppressed her joy deep in her heart."

Rāma's voice makes itself heard again, strong, resonant, and solemn!

"Let thy subjects," he says to Vibhīshana, "see thy mother standing by the side of her son, their monarch; it is assuredly a spectacle they have seen more than once, and yet, each time, it does not exite their curiosity the less.

"Neither houses, nor raiment, nor the circumscribed space of a seraglio, nor the etiquette of courts, nor any other kingly ceremonial, can veil a woman from the gaze of others; the only veil of a woman is her virtue. In misfortunes, in

marriages, in that ceremony wherein young maidens choose their husbands for themselves, during sacrifices, in public assemblies, a woman's face is for all to see.

" She before us here, is come as the fruit of victory and is plunged in deep affliction ; I see, therefore, no harm in placing her before you for all to see, especially in my presence. Let her leave the litter, and lead the Videhan on foot to me, so that the men of the woods may see her ! "

This speech gave evidence of deep but suppressed anger. Struck with stupor, the people looked at one another and augured some great catastrophe. Lakshmana, and even Sugrīva and Angada lost colour.

" Because of the indifference he showed for his wife, added to his terrible bearing, Sitā seemed in their eyes like a nosegay which had lost its charm and been flung away by its possessor."

Sītā descended from the litter. Under the veil of tears that covered her face her ideal beauty and her divine grace shone with pure and affecting brilliancy. The Vānaras gazed at her ecstatically. She walked through their midst tottering, frightened, trembling beneath their gaze , and now she is before Rāma.

" At the sight of this woman, whose pure soul animated her body with celestial beauty, the Raghuide shed tears, but spoke not a single word to her, for doubt was born in his soul

" Tossed about by conflicting emotions of anger and love, his face pale, his eyes deeply reddened with the effort of restraining his tears, Rāma sees this queen standing before him, her pure soul thrilling at the suspicion cast on her chastity, lost in thought, a prey to the liveliest pain, like a widow who has no longer a protector.

" She, this young woman, forcibly carried away by a demon, and tormented in odious captivity ; she, now hardly alive, as if come back from the world of the dead ; she, taken by violence from her hermitage, when left alone for an instant ; reproachless, innocent, with her soul ever pure, could she not win a single word from her husband ?

" She now, her eyes already bathed in the tears that her innate modesty had drawn from her, when she had to pass before all that assembled multitude,—she now, when close to Rāma, burst into a torrent of weeping, while she wailed out the words ' My husband ! '

"At these words, sobbed out, tears rose to the eyes of the chiefs of the Vānaras, and the whole multitude, seized with grief, broke into weeping."

"Thus, Sumitrā's son saw once more the woman loved like a sister and venerated like a mother; but he saw her scorned before all the people. With a quick movement, he covered his face with the folds of his robe, and, endeavouring to force back his tears, he compelled himself to remain firm and unmoved."

As to Sītā, the timid woman was lost in the outraged wife. Strengthened by the witness of her pure conscience, upheld by the feeling of dignity, she cast an eloquent look on Rāma.

"They saw her eyes fixed on Rāma with a look in which were mingled many feelings—astonishment, joy, love, anger, and even grief—all were there."

Rāma had also remarked the quick change that the noble attitude of the queen suppressed from finding open expression. Mastering himself, he broke his long and gloomy silence. "I have won thee from the hands of the enemy by force of arms, noble lady; it remains for thee now to act with a fortitude that the force of circumstances demands.

"My anger is satisfied, my vengeance is complete; with one and the same blow I have redeemed my honour, and killed my enemy. To-day, I have made my courage shine forth; to-day, my effort has borne fruit, my promise is fulfilled, I must not go back on myself.

"For thy rape in my absence by a demon in disguise, Destiny alone is answerable, fraud has shown itself the equal of courage.

"But what is there in common between the doer of a valiant deed and the man of little soul, who does not strenuously endeavour to blot out the shame that has redounded upon himself?"[1]

Sītā, hardly daring to understand those cruel words, loses her short-lived courage, and falls back again, more broken than ever, into the gulf of despair. So touching is she in her grief, that Rāma, fearing to succumb to the burning emotion which was agitating him, seeks for refuge against himself in violent anger. Contracting his dark eyebrows, he continues, without daring to look at her again:—

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. c

"What a man must do to wash away his dishonour has been done, when I have effected thy rescue; thus have I saved my honour.

"But know thou well this one thing:—the hardships I have borne in the war with my friends, were borne for the sake of resenting my wrongs, they were not suffered for thy sake, noble lady!

"Thou wast recovered from the enemy's hands by myself in my anger, but it was entirely, noble lady, to absolve myself from the blame incurred, and to wash away the stain from my illustrious family . . .

. . . . . .

"The sight of thee is most irksome to me . . . Depart then, I will give thee leave to depart, O Janakide, where thou pleasest!

"Look round on the ten points of space, and choose! there is nothing now in common between thee and me . . .

"No longer there remains in me any affection for thee . . .

"Depart, I say, wherever it shall please thee . . ."

This was repudiation indeed But as if enough of disgrace had had not yet been cast on the devoted and courageous woman, who had preferred the memory of an unfortunate husband to the love of a fortunate monarch, and tortures and imminent death to the violation of conjugal troth—to such shame Rāma yet adds the last and greatest ignominy; he tells her, whom he had once joined to his own life, to choose for a husband either Lakshmana or Bharata, or even Sugrīva or Vibhīshana! At the same time, by a harsh mixture of courtesy and scorn, he allows the depth of his suspicion to be perceived.

"Place thy heart where it pleases thee, Sītā; it is inconceivable that Rāvana, after seeing thee, so bewitching, and gifted with such heavenly beauty, could have any longer felt drawn to any one of the young women dwelling in his palace!"

Crushed is Sītā under the burden of this disgrace, thus publicly cast upon her by her only refuge, her sole protector Yet she tries to speak; and the majesty of her offended innocence shines in the answer that her slow and stammering voice can scarcely articulate.

"Dost thou desire to give me like a *bayadere* to other men? Me, born in a noble family, Indra of kings, and married to one of an illustrious race . . .

. . . . .

"I am not what thou thinkest I am, warrior with the long arms; place more confidence in me, for I am worthy of it; this I swear by thy virtue itself! . . .

. . . . . .

"Never even in thought, have I once failed in obedience to thee."[1]

She gently complains that the long intimacy of their union should not have revealed her love and chastity to her husband. Why had she not been told by Hanumān of the change that had come over Rāma's heart? By killing herself she would have spared him the perils encountered for her sake.

Then, with a mixture of severity, tenderness, and pride, she evokes in sad tones, the remembrance, lately so sweet, and now so bitter, of their wedding-day.

"But blindly swayed by anger, thou hast placed above all qualities, like a fickle-minded man, O king of men as thou art, my one quality, that I am a woman. I come by birth from the king Janaka, I was given a name that indicated my birth from Mother Earth, but thou hast shown no esteem for me, neither for my conduct, nor for my character, that these extraordinary facts should have drawn from thee.

"My hand, which as a young man, thou didst press, when I was a young woman, thou dost not consider as a warrant of my faithfulness; my virtue and my devotion, thou hast forgotten, thou hast cast behind thee."

She now collects her strength for a last effort, having exhausted all human means for attesting her purity. Heaven shall now bear witness for her, and by the test of fire the daughter of the Aryans will claim her rehabilitation. How often, at later dates, would not these ordeal scenes be found amongst the European Aryans!

Sadly but firmly, Sītā addresses Lakshmana:—

"Son of Sumitrā, erect a pile for me, this is the only remedy for my misfortune; my character unjustly struck by such repeated blows, I have no longer the strength to support life. Scorned by my husband, before all this assembled people, I enter the fire; it is the only befitting course for me to take."

Lakshmana hesitates . . . Anxiously he questions Rāma's eyes, and in them, and in the altered expression of his features



[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. ci.

reads a tacit acquiescence. He obeys. At that moment nobody dared longer look at Sītā's husband, so great was the ravage made by anger and grief on his noble face.

"As soon as she had performed the pradakshina round Rāma, who stood erect, but with head bowed down, the Videhan advanced towards the lighted fire

"She bowed first in honour of the gods; then of the Brāhmans; then, raising her joined hands to her temples, she addressed this prayer to the god Agni, when quite close to the pile: 'Even as I have never violated, either publicly or secretly, in actions or words, in mind or body, my plighted faith to the Raghuide, even as my heart never has been alienated from him, even so, Fire, my compurgator to all the world, protect me on all sides!' She makes a circle of the pyre, and as the Aryans believed in Agni as the supreme principle of life, as the universal spirit symbolized to them by fire, so Agni now inspires the last words of their descendant.

"O Agni, thou who animatest the bodies of all beings, save me, O most virtuous of gods, thou, who placed in my body, actest therein as my compurgator!"

She prostrates herself before her husband, and in the midst of the groans of the people, rushes into the flames. Rāma remains motionless, weeping.

But suddenly a crowd of Immortals descend to earth · Kuvera, god of riches, Yama, god of death, followed by his train of the spirits of the dead, Indra, sovereign of the ethereal regions; Varuna, the Neptune of India; Siva; and, lastly, Brahma: all arrive in their chariots of dazzling swiftness in flight Dasaratha, resplendent in divine glory, accompanied them.

Brahma extends his arm to Rāma who bows before him, he says, "How canst thou look on with indifference, while Sītā throws herself on the burning pyre? How, greatest of the greatest gods, how is it that thou dost not know thyself? What is it that *thou* art in doubt about, regarding the chaste Videhan, as if she were only the common wife of a common husband?"[1]

And Rāma answers:—

"It seems to me that I am but a simple child of Manu,

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap cii

that I am but Rāma, the son of king Dasaratha. If this is not so, wilt thou, divine Excellency, condescend to say who I am, and where I come from ? "

Then the ancient ancestor of the worlds, the principal creator, the self-existing Being, reveals to Rāma his divine origin in a sublime discourse : " Listen to the truth, Kakutshide, thou, whose strength has always sustained thee.

" Thou art Nārāyana, that god who is ever august, ever fortunate, whose weapon is the quoit . . . Thou art man and the greatest of men.

" Thou art the invincible one ; thou art Vishnu, bearing the conch-shell ; thou art Krishna himself, the eternal one . . . thou art both he that has been, and he that shall be ; thou art the vanquisher of enemies.

" The imperishable truth of the holy scriptures is in thee, Raghuide, in the middle, and at the end , thou art duty, the highest duty in the three worlds . .

" Thou art chief in war and chief in peace ; thou art intelligence, thought, patience, repression of the senses ; thou art the author of all things and hast no end . . .

" Thou art the abode of truth . . ."

Following the religious and philosophic instinct which induced the descendants of the Aryans to ascribe to one cause all the forces of the universe, Brahma confounds the gods, including himself, in the imposing personality of Vishnu.

" Scourge of thy enemies," he continues, " thou appearest at the beginning and the end of the three worlds, but no one knows thy beginning, nor thy end. ' Of what consists his being ? ' men ask themselves "

Strange contrast ! In that imposing scene were summed up and confused together, the beliefs of the Aryan and those of Brahmanical society. Only just now had Sītā invoked Agni as the principle of life , now it is Vishnu who is recognized by Brahma as the universal soul, the supreme mover, the upholder of the worlds. Day ends, night begins, but the last rays of the sinking sun still shine on the evening shades. Was that symbolical of the development expected from the germ contained in the Vedas, where the last strains of the hymns appeared to promise another birth in the future ?

" When thou closest thy eyes," continues Brahma, " men say it is night ; when thou openest them, that it is day,

the gods are ever in thy thoughts and nothing that is can exist without thee . . .

" It is said that light existed before the worlds, that darkness preceded light; but what was, before anything existed, men say it was *thou*, the supreme soul . . .

" Sītā herself is Lakshmī and thy august excellence is Vishnu, the god whose weapon is the discus, it is to compass the death of Rāvana that thou camest in human form to this earth."

Now the great work is finished. Now might Rāma return to his terrestrial empire, king in this world, god in all eternity.

" Never will the piety of these men be exercised in vain, who, devoted to thee, eldest of sages and greatest of men, will sing thy praises upon earth.

" Never will ruin fall on men, who will proclaim this holy praise, this heavenly history of bygone ages."

But the mortal nature in Rāma was still suffering Suddenly from the flames, rising pure and radiant, Agni darts forth in an incarnate form, holding the immaculate wife, and places her in Rāma's arms.

" The Fire draws from his own bosom to place in Rāma's the young, the beautiful, the good Videhan, now resplendent in ornaments of refined gold, in her curling black hair, robed in scarlet, wreathed with fresh garlands of flowers, and comparable to the young rising sun." [1]

He, " the incorruptible compurgator of the world," the supreme judge, has proved to Rāma the chastity and the sufferings of Sītā during the captivity, in which the violence of her abductor had kept her

" Receive her back, pure and stainless, not the slightest blemish exists in her, Raghuide ; I am warrant for it "

And Rāma declares that never has he doubted the fidelity of his wife.

His inexplicable conduct had as its object the revelation, to the world, of a virtue that should never have even incurred suspicion For the vindication of the queen's honour, it was necessary that the woman should suffer. On the day which saw the victory of Rāma and the pious fulfilment of his father's will, there was opened to that father the heaven of Indra,

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap ciii

whence he sees his children once more, and gazes with emotion on his daughter-in-law, the child of his adoption. But Swarga itself, and the groves of the Nandana, have little charm for him who has no one to love there ; with a melancholy tempered by pleasure, the late king envies the happiness of Kausalyā and of those who should live under the rule of Rāma. The fourteen years of exile were now completed ; Kausalyā is about to see her son, and Ayodhyā its master. Dasaratha extols the devotion of Lakshmana, the imperishable model of brotherly piety ; he attests the unchangeable purity, the constant attention to duty, of his daughter-in-law. A cloud nevertheless obscures the happiness of Rāma. When his father left the world fourteen years ago he cursed Kaikeyī and Bharata.

" May this malediction, lord," says Rāma, supplicatingly, " never fall on this mother or her son." [1]

" I consent," replies Dasaratha ; " what else dost thou desire ? " he adds tenderly.

" Cast thy eye on me with propitious look ! "

Before returning to heaven Dasaratha, addressing Sītā as " My daughter ! ", in a loud but gentle voice, bestows a last blessing on her past conduct, and nobly encourages her as to her conduct in the future

" Thy heart, O Videhan, must not entertain any resentment, owing to this apparent repudiation ; it is desire for thy good which caused Rāma to act thus, in order to bring about the recognition of thy purity.

" The noble action, the seal of thy purity, which thou hast performed to-day, my daughter, will eclipse the glory of all women in the ages to come

" Thou didst rejoice in obeying thy husband, and thou art not a woman who requires help in re-establishing herself, of this I am convinced ; but I must nevertheless give thee this advice, that thy husband must always be in thy eyes as the supreme divinity."

He re-ascends gloriously to Swarga ; but his gaze, bent downwards to the earth, rests on the well-beloved son whom he is leaving there. Indra having at Rāma's prayer resuscitated his allies killed on the battlefield, the gods invite the king of

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap civ.

Ayodhyā to console Sītā, and to return at once to the capital of his kingdom. It is the exile's warmest wish once more to see his country, his cherished mothers, amongst whom he still reckons Kaikeyī.

The retinue now begins its homeward journey. Rāma, Sītā, Lakshmana, the princes of the Vānaras, Vibhīshana and his councillors, are in the chariot Pushpaka. These of Rāma's allies desire to attend his coronation and to salute the queen Kausalyā.

It is a touching journey, for at each step the exiles find traces of their long and dramatic pilgrimage. Rāma shows his young wife, as she leans on him, the places which he had conquered for her sake, and where he had suffered without her; the hermitages they had inhabited together, happy even in their misfortune. memories, grateful or terrible, sweet or bitter, that prepare the way for the emotion roused by the last of them all —

" At last I see my father's palace . . . Ayodhyā! bow before it, Sītā, my Vidèhan, for now thou hast returned to it . ." [1]

Informed by Hanumān of the arrival of those whose absence they had mourned, Bharata and his people go out to meet them Thousands of warriors mounted on richly caparisoned elephants, lead the procession Bharata follows them, surrounded by his ministers, the chief Brāhmans, the notables of artisan corporations, the citizens laden with flowers and sweetmeats, a crowd of men on horseback and on foot, bearing lassoes, swords, and lances. The minstrels sing, the *bayadères* accompany them with conch-shells, kettle-drums, and tambourines

Bharata carried the ensigns of royalty, the umbrella, fan, and flyflap. On his head were the sandals which had been made over to him by Rāma on the mount Chitrakūta, when he yielded up to him the right of sovereignty for fourteen years, and which Bharata had laid on the throne, that he had never wished to ascend. The widows of Dasaratha, Kausalyā and Sumitrā at their head, accompanied him in their chariots.

Suddenly a great cry is heard. " There is Rāma ! " [2]

Bharata enters the chariot Pushpaka, and hardly has he embraced the feet of his brother and of his sister-in-law before Rāma presses him to his heart.

[1] *Yuddhakānda*, chap. cviii

[2] Ibid., chap. cxi.

Rāma approaches Kausalyā, emaciated with grief and penitence, and prostrates himself before her, before Sumitrā, and before Kaikeyī.

Bharata returns the ensigns of royalty to him to whom they are now due, and after stopping at the hermitage of Nandigrāma (where he had lived in retirement), he brings back the exiles to Ayodhyā, now adorned with flags, embalmed with perfume, and carpeted with flowers. Maidens and women all press on the route of the procession. They bid their sovereign welcome, and in artless, affectionate words tell him of their past regrets and of their present joy.

"The inhabitants of this city, their brothers and their sons, were longing to see thee, sire, and in their goodness the gods have happily granted their wish to-day.

"Kausalyā has suffered much sorrow, Kakutshide; thy absence gave infinite suffering to her and to all the inhabitants of Ayodhyā, without exception.

"Forsaken by thee, Rāma, this city was like heaven without a sun, like a sea bereft of pearls, like a night deprived of moonlight.

"To-day, when we are seeing thee, our salvation, at last close to us, O warrior of the long arms, Ayodhyā can justify her name of *The Impregnable* before any enemies, vainly ambitious of conquering her.

"During thy sojourn in the forests, O Rāma, those fourteen years, when we were living widely separated from thee, time passed for us with the slowness of fourteen centuries."

The procession has at last arrived at the palace. Freed now from the chains of etiquette, Kausalyā embraces Rāma and Lakshmana, and draws Sītā to her bosom. She has now, according to the strong expression of the poet, dethroned her grief.

It is at the prayer of the happy mother that Bharata instals the allies of the king of Ayodhyā in sumptuous residences.

The auguries are favourable; to-morrow at dawn the asterism Pushya will be in conjunction. It will be the hour of Rāma's consecration. The longed-for day has arrived at last. The great Brāhman, Vasishta, makes Rāma and Sītā sit on jewelled thrones turned towards the East. As the waters of consecration flow over the forehead of the eldest

of the Raghuides, heaven and earth mingle their transports of joy. The gods overwhelm the monarch with their gifts. Golden harvests spring from the earth, fruits acquire a sweeter flavour, and flowers a sweeter perfume. At the end of the ceremony Rāma offers Sītā jewels and dresses.

Amongst these gifts is a necklet of pearls, compared by the poet to the soft luminous rays of the moon. She unfastens a necklet that is already twined round her neck, and fixes her eyes first upon Hanumān and then upon her husband with a questioning look. Rāma understands her. "Noble lady," says he to her, "bestow that necklet upon the warrior thou art most pleased with. To him in whom thou hast always found courage, vigour, and intelligence."

The sovereign queen remembers the captive. Turning to him of the valiant and tender heart, who had on one day brought her consolation and on another happiness, she presents the precious jewel to the son of the Wind. Rāma bestows immortality on Hanumān, which Sītā sweetens to him by the enchanting delight that her gift had inspired him with.

And it was not without tears that the allies parted.

Shall we repeat with the poet the marvels of Rāma's reign, the reign of justice, virtue, goodness, the veritable golden age, in which mankind, healthy in body and mind, surrounded with a numerous progeny, enjoyed a long and happy life; in which trees would yield fruits at all seasons, and harvests would fill the barns to overflowing?

Here ends Vālmīki's song; but before entering into the more tumultuous scenes in which the heroes of the Mahābhārata move, and therefore into less serene regions, let us repeat the slokas with which the moralizing poet has closed the ancient epic poem.—

"This fortunate poem, which bestows glory, gives long life, and makes kings victorious, is the primordial poem lately composed by Vālmīki.

"Delivered from sin will be the man who, in this world, will ceaselessly listen to the recital of this admirable and varied history of the Raghuide of indefatigable works.

"He who listens to the recital of Rāma's deeds in the world shall have sons if he desires them; he shall have riches if he thirsts for them.

"Likewise the young girl who desires a husband shall

obtain this husband, the joy of her soul; has she parents beloved, who are travelling in foreign countries? her desire for a speedy reunion with them shall be granted.

"Those who in this world listen to the poem composed by Vālmīki himself, shall receive from heaven all the favours which they seek for in their desires, and for whose fulfilment they await in their hopes." [1]

On reading the work of the great epic writer of India, who but must think to find in it the outline of the legend that was to be immortalized by the divine blind poet under the beautiful sky of Ionia? Was it one of those memories common to peoples of the same race before their separation? Was it a vague echo of a far-off ancient story? Was it one of those marvellous affinities which are created at immense distances by the kinship of genius? Was it a reminiscence? Was it an intuition?

Certainly, if the Sanskrit had served as a type to the Hellenic epic, the Grecian genius would be obliged, on appropriating it for herself, to create it anew in her own image, and to imprint her own mark upon it; where there was confusion, obscurity, exaggeration, to establish order, light, naturalness. She ought, on reproducing the outline of the picture, to change its colours and modify the characters of its personages.

There, in the East, stands the monolith on its foundations underground. From the mountain of the gods rises a rock of red granite; and the hand of man, labouring on the work of nature, has hollowed out in it sanctuaries for the gods. Let us pause before the most imposing of those temples. Its aspect is colossal and mysterious, but there is wanting the unity of composition which is the seal of beauty, the floors and colonnades are superposed on the foundations laid by nature. In the interior of those grottos is produced a striking effect by the half light prevailing all over it. Bridges lead to lateral vaults, whose darkness has remained impenetrable. Elsewhere, over the tops of the platforms and of the peristyles, is spread the velvety sky in which shine, turn by turn, the fiery globe with its dazzling rays, or the silvery disk of the night, of which the sparkling stars are the divine torches. Here, above, a radiant light; there, below,

[1] *Yuddhakânda*, chap. cxiii.

a black darkness. A crowd of statues decorate this temple; they want proportion, but their expression is always powerful, even gracious; sometimes even in their type, as in their attitude, they recall the classic elegance of the Grecian art. In general, however, the divinities of the Hindu pantheon are represented by those strange monstrous forms given by man to his gods, "in primitive times, before man had learnt to express his symbols with the grace and beauty of art." The sculptor's chisel has graven upon the granite, in magnificent bas-reliefs, scenes from the ancient poems. In certain figures, half-human half-animal, one cannot define the limits which separate the two natures, one from the other. But here is a pillar, Indian in style, at whose base expand the leaves of the acanthus, that give it the appearance of a Corinthian pillar reversed Elsewhere the arabesque, a veritable stone embroidery, winds in capricious designs, which even Moorish art could not surpass in its marvellous tracery. Outside, the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics twines and trails itself round the temple. Nowhere else have the work of nature and that of man become more admirably mingled; it is the *Kailāsa* of *Ellora*; it is also the *Rāmāyana*.

But towards the West, some thousands of miles distant, rises another Acropolis on another mountain Man, in transporting thither the white marble of the Pentelicus, has built with it the most sublime monument of the purest art, the most beautiful that ever charmed mortal . . . The form is that of a peristyle surrounding a long square With one look the eye embraces its majestic unity "It was," as once said the celebrated poet, who, centuries after, came to dream over the ruins of the temple of Minerva, "it was a single thought in stone, one only, and intelligible at a single look, as, too, was ancient thought." [1] Everything was grand, but everything had a harmonious sobriety Here there was no sudden alternations from darkness to light. A serene light spreads itself equally over all parts of the edifice of marble that, in the beautiful days of Attic genius, Pericles commanded to be erected The chisel of Phidias, which had cut out the frieze that runs along its exterior, had also carved in gold and ivory, that statue of Minerva, well-proportioned even in its

[1] M de Lamartine, *Voyage en Orient*

colossal dimensions, which stands in the interior of the temple. But did the Grecian genius, so smitten with plastic beauty, always illumine her types with that divine ray from the soul, namely, expression? Here, the hand of man alone appears, and only in the horizon is discovered the olive woods and the azure sea; it is the *Parthenon*; it is also the *Iliad*.

Already have ingenious parallels been drawn between some of the personages who have moved in the scenes celebrated in the Rāmāyana and the *Iliad*. We will only compare here the two heroines of the Grecian epic and their older Indian sisters. In comparing Helen with Sītā, do we not call to memory the identity of the two situations which form the basis of both poems?

Like Sītā, Helen was captured by the man who had presented himself in the guise of a guest under her roof; but the one willingly follows her ravisher, while the other energetically defends her honour and her wifely love The one lives in the delights of her new position, and if at times she suffers, it is on account of her remorse, her shame, the scorn that she feels she must inspire even in the Trojans, and the danger that she has made the family of Paris incur, the other, in the bosom of her fairy-like abode, betakes herself to seclusion, grief, and fasting, prefers death to dishonour, crushes with her scorn those who would retain her, and ardently calls to those from whom she has been torn In the *Iliad*, as in the Rāmāyana, this rape causes a war, which on behalf of the outraged husband assembles the people, and makes them overcome by prayer or by force, the resistance of the Ocean to grant them a passage. As in the Grecian epic, so in the Sanskrit, the besieged, frightened at the dangers which are bursting over them, blame the prince, whose crime has dragged them with him into the abyss that he has himself dug. In this, as in the other poem, men at the sight of the heroine admire the beauty of the woman, for the sake of whom so many great actions have been performed.

But what a difference in the reunion of the heroines to their husbands! The *Odyssey* shows us Helen re-admitted, as if it was natural and a matter of course, after her crime, into the very palace which she had voluntarily left; whereas Sītā, notwithstanding the love and the esteem immovably vowed to her by her husband, must be justified in the eyes

of the people, before she can be again admitted to the domestic hearth, from which violence had snatched her; and the virtuous wife has to go through the test of fire. What a contrast in the ideas that these two nations formed of the wife's honour, and of the respect due to the domestic sanctuary! Besides, in what century, in what country, in what literature, could there be found a more admirable type than that of Sītā? What lyre ever sang a more pure and more touching heroine? What analogous creation could there be met with in the tragic writers of Athens and the poets of Rome? And in modern times, from the heroines of Shakespeare to those of Racine, where could there be found that sweet mixture of love, chastity, high-born yet artless grace, passionate devotion, dignity, faithfulness to duty, which make Sītā the ideal model of womanly perfection?

But in the parallel that naturally establishes itself between Tārā and Andromache, the palm remains with the latter.

Both endeavour to preserve their husbands from the dangers of the combat, but if Tārā dreads to see Bāli reply to the war-cry of his adversary, it is principally because she knows that he upholds an unjust cause; she reasons more than she loves Andromache, whose parents the Fates have already taken from her, only fears for Hector's life, who was at once "her father, her venerable mother, her brother, and her young husband"[1] Their lamentations over the corpses of their husbands are perhaps equally dramatic in their different expressions; the two wives make bitter lamentation over the infant whom the father's death leaves without support, but misfortune, which seems to have weakened maternal love in Tārā, doubles it in Andromache Is there anything more natural, and consequently more harrowing, than the too-well-founded fears of Hector's widow about the destiny of his son Astyanax?

Then, shortly after Bāli has breathed his last, we find Tārā united to him who had caused the death of her husband Here again, she is noble and great, she is touching even in her mission of peacemaking, in her beneficial influence; but she is all devotion to her second marriage; and, of the husband, whom lately she did not wish to survive, not a word or thought!

[1] *Iliad*, translated by M. Giguet, book vi.

Homer had respected in Andromache the wife of Hector. Neither in the *Iliad* nor in the *Odyssey* does she appear after her husband's funeral. And the poets well understood that delicacy of feeling, who, after the divine blind poet, sang of the pure heroine. When in the *Andromache* of Euripides, as in that of Racine and in the epic of Virgil, Andromache weeps for her adopted country, which the Greeks have overthrown, and bewails the day when she must leave the ashes of Hector; when the swan of Mantua points out to us, with its white wing, Andromache, queen of the Molossi, endeavouring, on the banks of a "false Simois",[1] to believe herself yet in Troy, paying honour near a cenotaph to the spirit of Priam's son—Andromache, whether the slave of Pyrrhus or the wife of Helenus, is always the widow of Hector!

But how much, generally speaking, in the two poems, is the moral elevation of the Greeks below that of the Indians! Let us compare the generous, heroic, and truly humane sentiments attested by the Rāmāyana, to those selfish, barbarous, and cruel instincts of which too often the *Iliad* is the artless witness. And, above all, that dominant idea of duty, that precise notion of what is just and unjust, where can this be found in the Homeric epic?

The *Iliad* forms no longer part of the sacred books of any people. Its gods have departed. But the Rāmāyana has remained the sacred book of the Hindus; and its hero, the purest, if not the most adored, of their divinities. Still, in our day, Rāma disputes with Krishna the love of the women of India; and when the widows burn themselves on their husband's pyres, from the midst of the flames, they invoke the memory of Sītā's husband to give them strength to bear their agony.

What numberless times has not the road from Ayodhyā to Lankā been followed by the pious Hindus of modern India! What numberless times have they not invoked the memory of Rāma and of Sītā, beneath the mysterious shadows of their great forests! Those who have made that great journey are saved. Those, too, are saved, who are overtaken by death in that rough pilgrimage, even should they not have accomplished it, but whose lips before closing for ever yet murmur, "Rām! Rām!"

[1] Virgil, *Aeneid*, iii, 302.

Ah! if one day this people could again understand and practise the virtues given by precept and by example in this epic! If the divine torch of Christianity, by throwing light on so many sublime acts, could make them re-discover the spiritual indications of their ancestors, could develop in them the almost Christian germs contained in their ancient poetry; what might not be expected from such a regeneration!

## CHAPTER III

## WOMAN DURING THE HEROIC PERIOD

### II. *The Mahābhārata*

Gāndhārī, the wife of the blind king. The two wives of Pāndu, Kuntī, and Mādrī. Hidimba, the child of the forest. The wife and the daughter of the Brāhman of Ekachakrā. Draupadī, daughter of the king of the Pānchālas. Subhadrā, sister of Krishna. Uttarā, daughter of the king of Matsya. The widows of the warriors in the field of the law.
The legend of serpents. A race lost and saved by a woman. The resurrection of Pramadvarā
The legend of Nala Damayantī. Her escort of virgins The nurse in ancient times. Damayantī's parents.
The legend of Sāvitrī Sāvitrī The mother of Satyavān.
Character of the heroines in the Mahābhārata.

THE occasion of a sacrifice had assembled the Rishis, divine sages, in the forest of Naimisha. They saw a man coming towards their hermitage. It was Ugrasravas, the son of Lōmaharshana

"Where do you come from ?" was the question addressed to him by the wise men, after they had paid him the honours required by the hospitality of Oriental countries.

Ugrasravas had heard a long dramatic recital at the sacrifice of serpents. The author of it was Krishna Dvaipāyana. the Vyāsa or diasceuast, to whom was attributed the compilation of the Vedas. In it he celebrated the history of his descendants. It was his disciple, Vaisampāyana, who, in his presence and in that of his royal posterity, repeated the songs inspired by the misfortunes of his race.

Ugrasravas longed to see the field of battle, the scene of the bloody fratricidal struggle of which Vyāsa had revealed the stirring events; that battlefield which in these days is still pointed out near Delhi. And thus it was that he made a halt in the forest of Naimisha.

The Rishis wished to hear that recital, and under dark leafy arches, in the silence of the woods, their guest, lifting up his voice, related to these men of peace and contemplation, the struggles of the Kshattriyas.

It was the Mahābhārata.

Two hundred thousand verses go to make up this epic, which is not the work of an individual, but the collective labour of centuries. Twenty-four thousand distichs or slokas, only, are consecrated to the action of the poem; thus much has the episodic part invaded the primitive story.[1] We do not possess a complete translation of the Mahābhārata in any European language; but the indefatigable Indianist, M. Fauche, to whom France already owes a version of the Rāmāyana, has undertaken this gigantic work. Until now, the plan and some parts of the great epic were alone known, either from the learned analysis of Messrs. Lassen, Monier Williams, Schlegel, or from the elegant translations of Messrs Bopp, Foucaux, Pavie, Eichhoff, Pauthier, Émile Burnouf, Nève, Sadous, Troyer. Let us endeavour by the aid of these fragments to reconstruct the ancient statue on the sketches that we possess.

Since the Rāmāyana, the moral elevation of the Indians had declined. The heroes of the Mahābhārata have not the serenity, the gentleness, the divine greatness of Rāma They are more accessible to the miseries of this world; their generosity does not exclude the sharp resentment of injuries, in a word, they are mortal.

Only in the episodic part are contained legends much more ancient than even the basis of the Mahābhārata; there alone can be breathed the morning breezes whose vivifying and caressing breath can be felt in the history of the king of Ayodhyā.

As a general rule, the sky remains covered with dark stormy clouds. The hurricane blows with violence. The heavy and overwhelming heat of midday weighs upon the earth And when even the thunderbolt has fallen, the thunder rumbles still in the distance, and a vague anxiety, an indefinable uneasiness, prevent man from believing in the return of calm

The epic introduces us to the kings of the Lunar dynasty,[2]

[1] In the hundred thousand slokas of the Mahābhārata is included the sixty thousand, three hundred and seventy-four distichs of the Harivansa, composed at a much later date

[2] It would seem that in the Lunar dynasty, woman had the right of succeeding to the throne The Mahābhārata offers us an indication of this custom " It (the Mahābhārata) must often be listened to by a young king and his spouse „ this induces the birth of a heroic son or daughter, who will share the throne " (*Episodes of the Mahābhārata*, translated by M Foucaux ) The grandmother of the Pāndavas, Pāndeā, daughter of Vyāsa, was, it is

established at Hastināpura. Of the three sons of Vyāsa, the eldest, Dhritarāshtra, blind from his birth, had, on account of his infirmity, been set aside from the succession to the throne of his ancestors; but when his brother, Pāndu, renounced the slavery of royalty and adopted the free life of a hunter, the reins of government were entrusted to Dhritarāshtra. Both the brothers were married. Dhritarāshtra had married Gāndhārī, daughter of the king of Gāndhāra. When Bhisma, his uncle, asked for, and obtained, in his name, the hand of the princess, the betrothed, far from dreading an alliance with a blind man, covered her eyes with a thick bandage, to show that she thus renounced a privilege that nature had refused to the man whose fate she was to share

"So that I cannot reproach my husband on account of his misfortune", [1] thus she thought to herself, and the Indian poet finds nothing unnatural in this sacrifice, made from a feeling of heroic delicacy

By that devoted wife, Dhritarāshtra had twice as numerous a progeny as Priam; but of those hundred sons, none inherited that mixture of goodness and weakness that characterized the crowned blind man, nor that touching delicacy of feeling that in Gāndhārī was joined to constant firmness The eldest, Duryōdhana, especially, was born with the most violent instincts

Two wives had been married to Pāndu; Kuntī, princess of the Yādavas, the future aunt of Krishna, the most celebrated of Vishnu's incarnations, and Mādrī, sister of a king of Madra, whom Bhisma had obtained for his nephew, in exchange for a large quantity of gold and jewels [2] This sale of a wife was quite an anomalous incident in the customs of India, and was in defiance of the Brāhmanical laws, which could not have happened except in a country less under sacerdotal influence than the "central province" (madhyadesa).

said, the first queen of the country which bore her name, Pāndimandala. The Karnatic was also governed by a woman See on this subject the notes with which Major Troyer has enriched his translation of *The History of Kashmir*, vol ii, and the learned study published by M Jules Vinson in the *Revue de l'Orient* (1862, November–December), on the ancient history of the south of India

[1] We quote this from the first volume of the translation of the *Mahābhārata* by M Fauche, a work published at the moment of going to press.

[2] Cf Monier Williams, *Indian Epic Poetry*.

Five children were born of these two wives. Yudhisthira, son of Dharma, god of justice; Bhīma, son of Vāyu, the Eolus of the Hindu pantheon; and Arjuna, son of Indra; these three had Kuntī for their mother; and the two twins sprung from the Aswins, the Dioscuri of India, owed the light of day to Mādrī. As children of the gods, the Pāndavas were a divine offshoot.

We have elsewhere related how,[1] at the death of Pāndu, his two widows disputed the right of dying on his pyre, and how Mādrī, the well-loved companion of the deceased prince, obtained that sad honour, that supreme consolation, after having bequeathed to Kuntī the children she was leaving behind.

The Pāndavas were brought up in the depths of the forests, their character was fortified and their intelligence developed under the strict guidance of the Brāhmans Arrived at adolescence, they, with their mother, were conducted by their spiritual masters to the court at Hastināpura, and Dhritarāshtra received his orphan nephews with paternal affection At the same time as the sons of the reigning king, the sons of the late king received from the Brāhman, Drona, a sound and brilliant military education. But it was not long before a secret jealousy poisoned the relations between the Pāndavas and their cousins The sacerdotal caste cherished those royal children whom it had sheltered in its bosom, nourished in its precepts, and fitted for a high destiny. The other classes of society gave their warmest sympathies to the offspring of their well-beloved king, Pāndu, those five brothers of brilliant valour and divine beauty. They compared their urbanity, their goodness, to the scornful pride and growing cruelty of their cousins. The latter had heard, and had understood, the sentiments of the people. Duryōdhana himself had not recoiled from crime in order to satiate his vengeance, but the gods were protecting their posterity

It was at a tournament that the hatred, long nourished by the Kurus[2] against the Pāndavas, burst forth.

A vast tribunal, decorated with numerous trophies,

[1] See 1st pt, Chap III.

[2] Kuru was one of the ancestors in common to the sons of Pāndu and those of Dhritarāshtra, but the name of Kauravas more particularly designates the latter

surrounded the arena. Elevated seats, placed under sumptuous tents, were reserved for the women.

The royal tribunal, suspended from a chain of pearls, inlaid with gold and lapis lazuli, was occupied by Dhritarāshtra and his councillors Gāndhārī, Kuntī, and all the women of the gynæceum joined in the festival

Dressed all in white, from the cord of investiture that encircled his waist to the garland that crowned his snow-white locks, Drona presided over the warlike sports of his pupils.

On swift chariots the princes performed marvellous evolutions, and, whether disputing the goal or fighting in single combat, they rivalled one another in agility, grace, and bravery.

Duryōdhana and his cousin Bhīma meet, and while the two implacable enemies are attacking each other with their clubs, Kuntī describes to Gāndhārī the incidents of a struggle which the voluntary blindness of the queen prevented her from watching

Suddenly there bursts forth a sound of conch-shells, and other instruments; a deafening acclamation goes up from the assembled masses, the Pāndava, Arjuna, who united the sculptured beauty of an ancient hero to the chivalric bearing of a warrior of our Middle Ages, has now appeared, and, bowing before Drona, receives his benediction

"There," exclaimed the people, delirious with excitement, "there comes the son of Kuntī, the illustrious descendant of Pāndu, scion of the powerful Indra, protector of the Kurus—there is the most skilful of fighters, the most virtuous of mortals! the precious store-house of wisdom and science!" [1]

The maternal heart of Kuntī beats with pride and joy, and silent tears drop from her eyes, as they gaze lovingly on the young hero

Arjuna, making sport of all difficulties, conquering all obstacles, is on the point of carrying off the honours of the tournament But Kuntī's joy disappears, and horror is painted on her face A young and handsome man presents himself, and in a defiant attitude, challenges Arjuna

The widow of Pāndu recognizes Karna, a son she had had by the Sun, of whose origin her other children were ignorant.

Arjuna scornfully accepts the stranger's challenge.

[1] *Fragments of the Mahābhārata*, translated from Sanskrit into French, by A Sadous; Paris, Benjamin Duprat, 1858.

"It is power that distinguishes kings," said Karna to him, "but it is heroism that confers nobility."

They prepare for the combat. Duryōdhana, who suspects a powerful auxiliary in Karna, gives him the kiss of farewell.

Kuntī witnesses the preparations for this fratricidal combat, that, with a word, she could prevent. That word she dare not say. Her forces fail her, and she swoons. Restored by her women, and comforted by Vidura, her brother-in-law, she desires to follow the incidents of the fight; but her eyes, dimmed by terror, though fixed upon her sons, cannot distinguish them.

Meanwhile, Arjuna refuses to fight with a man who cannot announce the name of his ancestors Duryōdhana removes the difficulty by anointing Karna king of Anga, on the spot.

"Thou hast given me a kingdom, lord," said Karna, to his protector, "what may I give thee in return? say, O prince! I have the power to satisfy thee—My friendship?—I give it to thee" And the two princes rush into each other's arms.

Suddenly, a man of the people, an aged man, breaks into the arena. Without his upper garment, his limbs trembling, covered with perspiration, he rushes breathlessly towards Karna; it was his foster-father

"At sight of him, Karna, dropping his bow, bows before his father, his head still moist with the holy oil The latter, overcome, wraps his garment round the feet of his son, and, his heart filled with tenderness, he can only utter but one word "O my son!" Then folding in his arms the head of the king of Anga, he adds the consecration of a father's tears to the royal consecration of Duryōdhana.[1]

Arjuna, more than ever, now refuses to fight with the son of a Sūta, of a charioteer, and Bhima scornfully says to the noble Karna, "Go, take a whip, that is the sceptre of your family!"

Always towards the Sun, his father, used Karna, to lift his eyes, whenever insults made his heart beat high. Now again was this action his only answer. Duryōdhana was preparing to maintain with his arms the cause of his new friend, but already was the shadow of night descending on the arena. The people dispersed, and while Yudhisthira himself, rendering homage to the noble bearing of his brother's rival, repeated.

[1] See Mr R C Dutt's translation of the *Mahābhārata*, Temple Classics

" No, not on earth can there be any heroes equal to Karna," Kuntī, freed from her anxieties, smiled in her heart at Karna's glory.

The growing popularity enjoyed by the Pāndavas, the brilliant valour they displayed in the tournament as on the field of battle, kindled still more the jealousy of the Kurus. The wish of the inhabitants of Hastināpura was to see the eldest of the Pāndavas, Yudhisthira, consecrated in the succession to the throne

Duryōdhana took alarm. He implored his father to foil the ambitious designs of the sons of Pāndu. The feeble old man hesitated, he tenderly loved his nephews, and would have been happy to bequeath to them a throne to which he recognized their right to aspire. Overcome at last by the pressing solicitations of his children, he tried to inspire in the hearts of the Pāndavas a desire to visit the superb town of Vāranāvata. He vainly disguised this exile under the semblance of a pleasure journey, the Pāndavas understood that the reign of Duryōdhana had now begun.

Before their departure, they go to take leave of the women whose venerable age make them a mark for the respect of youth. They leave with troubled hearts, for a mysterious warning given them by their uncle Vidura makes them feel a vague, yet imminent danger

Arrived at their new abode, and surrounded with all the refinements of princely luxury, they cannot forget the watchful hatred of Duryōdhana, nor the significant words of Vidura; they know that their cousin will not be pleased to see them living in this resplendent exile

The house of lacquer work, in which they were living, was plastered over with inflammable materials, and a trusty follower of Duryōdhana was only waiting for a favourable moment to convert it, as well as its inmates, into a heap of cinders Yudhisthira saw and heard everything. The Pāndavas feigned ignorance One year passed, during which they prepared a subterranean outlet. They themselves set fire to their house of lacquer work, which buried beneath its ruins Duryōdhana's spy. The Pāndavas escaped with their mother; and, while Dhritarāshtra and his people were left in the painful belief of their death, and the funeral sacrifice was being offered in their honour, the fugitives had crossed the Ganges

in a boat placed there by Vidura, and had penetrated into the forests. Bhīma, the Hercules of India, carried his mother and supported his brothers' steps.

Like Rāma in former times, the Pāndavas took the path of exile; but what a contrast! When the princes of Ayodhyā entered the forest, nature displayed herself before their wistful eyes with her sweetest attractions. The song of birds, the perfume of flowers, the protecting shadow of the woods, all smiled upon them; even night herself, whose calmness and beauty invited them to a sweet repose, and whose serenity and melancholy charm answered so well to the feelings of their own hearts. True, they regretted those whom they were leaving behind them, but they felt calm, they felt strong, for they had pardoned those who had injured them!

Let us now see what met the first steps of the Pāndavas in the solitudes that, guided by the constellations, they traversed during the night.

"With great difficulty, Bhimasena carries his glorious, but delicately formed mother over rocks and precipices, and towards evening they find themselves in a wood with but little water or fruit or roots in it, but full of birds of prey and wild beasts . Terrible was the darkness, fearful the number of these birds and beasts. Fierce winds blew from all quarters, and out of all season, darkening the horizon with falling leaves and fruit . with bushy shrubs crowded together, with numberless great trees all bent under the weight of their boughs, swaying violently to and fro" [1]

Here the tumult in nature answered to the tumult in the hearts of the Pāndavas What desires for vengeance would not be made, during these gloomy hours, to gather force in their bosoms, now that every kind of physical and moral torture seemed united to overwhelm them!

"Then, tormented by fatigue and thirst, the Pāndavas could proceed no further; the need of sleep made itself felt more and more; close together, they had penetrated into the great desolate forest, and Kuntī, exhausted from want of water, at last cried out to her sons, she, the mother of the five Pāndavas, and standing surrounded by them · "Thirst has conquered me!"

[1] *Fragments of the Mahābhārata*, translated from Sanskrit into French, from the Sanskrit text of Calcutta, by Th Pavie; Paris, Benjamin Duprat, 1844.

That groan, that cry of distress broke Bhīma's heart, the only one of the five brothers whose superhuman strength left him the power to feel for the sufferings of the others. That giant, in whom physical instincts might have been expected to stifle the delicacies of moral feeling, on the contrary united, at that moment, the anxious and provident solicitude of a mother to the firm constancy of a hero Not far from there, a sacred fig-tree spread its vast branches. Bhīma laid his precious burden under its shade, and the cry of the cranes revealing to him the proximity of a pond, he was not long in discovering the well-spring they were panting for.

Having quenched his own thirst, he drew water for the succour of those yet suffering beneath the pipala, and flew back, notwithstanding his lassitude. "Exhausted by trouble of mind and bodily pain, he hissed like a serpent."

But Kuntī and her sons had been overtaken by sleep. They slumbered, stretched upon the earth, finding, perhaps, a momentary respite to their sufferings. Bhīma gazed upon them with feelings of love, mingled with bitterness. His mother especially filled his thoughts He shuddered to see the noble princess, accustomed to the luxurious delights of courts, subjected to the hardships of fate to such a degree, that a bed on the bare ground, and a drink of water should be the height of her desires. And he felt a bitter longing to kill the author of their misfortunes

At last he decided to interrupt a sleep that was doubtless troubled with painful dreams, and, with his refreshing drink, to comfort those who had gone to sleep, burning with thirst, exhausted with fatigue.

The Pāndavas had been wandering for some days in these desolate solitudes One night, when Kuntī and four of her sons were sleeping, and Bhīma guarding their slumbers, the Rākshasa, Hidimba, discovered the fugitives from the top of a tree The cannibal, delighted at the sight of a repast for which he was hankering, orders his sister Hidimbā to kill the men and their companion, and to prepare for him a bloody feast with their bodies

The Rākshasī, flying off at her brother's command, arrives near those he had pointed out to her. She looks a long time at Bhīma, the athlete under whose protection a whole family securely reposed even in the midst of danger, and, with the

feeling of tenderness, pity creeps into her heart. She cannot kill him, the one whom she has already chosen for a husband.

"Never will I carry out my brother's cruel command! Love for a husband is all-powerful, and gets the better of love for a brother. If I should kill him, only for one instant would my and my brother's happiness last; and in not killing him, joy for ever awaits me." [1]

Then she changes herself into a woman; she is fair to look upon, on her blushing visage, under her downcast eyelashes, shines that which alone consecrates beauty, namely, modesty. She approaches the fugitives and interrogates Bhīma:—

"From whence comest thou, and, who art thou, O prince of men? Who are these slumbering figures, with forms so divine? Who is this dark and slender woman, of such youthful charm? She is sleeping here in this forest, apparently without any anxiety, as if in her own home. She knows not the terrors of this wilderness, nor that it is inhabited by Rākshasas." [2]

She then revealed to him the perfidious designs of her brother, and the mission that had been confided to her. She confessed to him the feeling that had arrested her hand at the moment she was preparing to obey the sanguinary order of the cannibal.

"I will save thee, O hero! from this cannibal Rākshasa, we will live together in the caves of the mountains, be my husband! . . . For I know how to fly in the air, I go where I please; enjoy an affection that has no equal, here, there, or anywhere . . . with me!" [2]

[1] *Ardschuna's Reise zu Indra's Himmel*, nebst anderen Episoden des Maha-Bharata, in der Ursprache zum erstenmahl herausgegeben, metrish übersetz, und mit kritischen Anmerkungen versehen von Franz Bopp Berlin, 1824

"Meines Bruders Befehl werd' ich, den grausamen, erfullen nie
Gattenliebe ist doch mächtig, siegt der Freundschaft zum Bruder ob
Einen Augenblick nur währte meines Bruder und meine Lust
Wenn ich tödte, doch nicht todtend, bluhet ewige Wonne mir"

How much we regret to lose the poetic beauty of the German version in the prosaic translation! We have robbed the casket of the illustrious Indianist of *outre-Rhin*, of a diamond of the first water . . . but, alas! in passing through our hands, it runs the risk of re-becoming coal!

[2] *Hidimba's Tod*, zweiter Gesang:—

"Woher bist du genaht also, und wer, o Fürst der Männer du!
Wer sind jene, die hier schlafen, Menschen von göttlicher Gestalt!—
Wer die Braune allhier, sage, die schlank', in jugendlichem Reiz!
Schläft hier in Walde doch diese sorgenlos, wie in eignem Haus.
Sie kennt nicht diese Einöde, die von Riesen bewohnet ist"

[2] *Études sur l'Inde ancienne et moderne*, by M Théodore Pavie (*Revue*

But Bhīma refused. And what man with a heart could consent to abandon those who had no hope but in him, and deliver them up as food to the monsters of the forest, whilst, sheltered from danger, he would, like a coward, be living in the enjoyment of pleasure?

What mattered that obstacle to Hidimbā? Already had her love awakened charity. She would save the mother and the brothers of him whom she loved, and, by her supernatural power, carry them through the air to distant inaccessible regions.

Useless offer! Bhīma would not fly with her. The young girl must go away, or send her brother against him, the Hercules of India could overthrow the giant.

During all this contention, the Rākshasa was waiting. Tired at his sister's long delay in carrying out his orders, he hastened up

Far off the Rākshasī saw her brother coming. Her entreaties to Bhīma became more urgent still. He must hasten to awake those dear to him, for she would soon no longer be able to save from the cannibal the victims that his monstrous appetite craved for.

Conscious of his strength, Bhima remained impassive. "Do not offer me the insult," said he to the young girl, "of thinking I am merely mortal and nothing more . . ."[1]

"I do not despise thee, O strong one," replied she. "In appearance, men are like the inhabitants of heaven; nevertheless in strength, the giants are their superiors"[2]

The Rākshasa has heard these last words, he has seen his sister transfigured, tender and supplicating, and he rushes furiously upon her.

"Thou dost not tremble then, Hidimbā, before my anger, O foolish one! Woe to thee! "[3]

*des Deux-Mondes*, 4th article, 15th April, 1857) Under this title, *L'amour dans la foret*, M Pavie has analysed this episode with that loftiness of perception, high colouring, and delicacy of touch which characterizes his productions whether literary or learned.

[1] *Études sur l'Inde ancienne et moderne*, par M Th. Pavie

[2] *Hidimba's Tod*, dritter Gesang —

"Ich verachte dich nicht, Starker! gleich den Himmlischen an Gestalt
Den Menschen sind; an Kraft aber überlegen die Riesen doch"

[3] Ibid —

"Zitterst du denn, Hidimba, nicht von meinem, Zorn, o Thörichte!
Weh' dir !"

He insults her, threatens her life, accusing her of having cast the first stain on the honour of the prince of the Rākshasas.

But Bhīma, smiling, intercepts the black giant, carried away, as he is, by his anger, saying satirically :—

" Why, Hidimba, awaken those who are enjoying a delicious sleep ? Attack me, now, O vile being ! Rākshasa, enemy of mankind ! Attack me, a man, and one who has the courage to resist , thou wouldest not kill a woman, surely . .

" Thy sister, thou shame the giants ! came at thy command , timorous creature, she sees me, loves me. No ! she does not dishonour her race . ! stand your ground against me, perverse one !—Thou wouldest not kill a woman, surely." [1]

Defying the Rākshasa, Bhīma declares that the pilgrims would soon be able, thanks to him, to traverse freely the forest, purged of the monsters infesting it.

The swarthy demon prepares for the fight He would not strike at those whose flesh he longed for, and at her who had betrayed him, until after he has tasted the blood of the man who defended them

The two giants grasp each other close. Soon has Bhīma thrown down the monster, whose cries, repeated from echo to echo, shake the depths of the forest. " Make no noise," says Bhīma, dragging him along the ground, " my brothers are reposing here in sweet slumber " [2] The giant continues to defend himself, the two adversaries push each other about in turn, breaking down trees and tearing up bushes. Then awoke Kuntī and the Pāndavas.

The adversaries were now far off, but the princes saw near their mother a young and beautiful woman. They admired her with surprise Kuntī also looked at her and smiled. In a gentle voice the princess addressed the daughter of the forests :—

[1] *Hidimba's Tod*, vierter Gesang —

" Warum, Hidimbas ! denn wecken sie, die wonnigen Schlafs sich freun ?
Auf mich stürzte heran, Schnöder ! alsbald, Riese, der Menschen Feind !
Auf mich heran, den Muthvollen ; ein Weib wollest du tödten nicht

* * * * *

Deine Schwester, o Grausamer ! Schande der Riesen allgesammt !
Kam auf deinen Befehl her ja, schaute meine Gestalt allhier.
Jetzo liebt mich die Furchtsame ; nein, sie entehrt nicht ihren Stamm !

* * * * *

Mir stehe nun, o Ruchloser !—Ein Weib wollest du tödten nicht "

[2] *Hidimba's Tod*, vierter Gesang —

" Keinen Lärmen ! . . schlafen hier meine Brüder sanft "

" Whose daughter art thou, O gracious woman ; and who art thou, O thou so charming to look at ? What is thy object in thus approaching us ? Whence comest thou ? Art thou the goddess of this solitude, or at least an Apsara ? Tell me everything and why thus thou stayest here ? " [1]

The young black, feeling the need of winning the favour of the mother of him she loved, answered with humble deference. She described to her the scene that had just taken place, and pointed out to her in the distance the giant and the young man, each trying to crush the other in a last struggle.

The Pāndavas hastened to the place. Excited by Arjuna, Bhīma clasped the monster tight, and whirled him rapidly round himself, a hundred times ; then he exclaimed :—

" In vain does the flesh of man nourish thee, in vain does it fatten thee, O vile creature ! In vain ! for thou deservest death ! In vain ! for thou must die at once ! " [2]

Arjuna was preparing to offer assistance, but the robust Aryan had already crushed the black demon.

Dawn now glowed with the rosy tints of morning. A town was descried in the distance ; and the Pāndavas joyfully took the road to it with their mother

The Rākshasī followed them

But Bhīma misunderstanding the feeling that attracted the young black to him, repulsed her with scorn. He attributed her desire to accompany them to an intention of avenging her brother. The good and just Yudhisthira reproached him for that act of brutality .—

" Even in thy anger, O hero, O Bhīmasena, beware of ill-treating a woman ; always act with justice, which takes precedence of care for one's own safety Thou hast put to death this most powerful enemy who came here to kill us ; but as for the sister of this monster, what could she in her anger do against us ? "

[1] *Hidimba's Tod*, vierter Gesang :—
" Wessen bist du, o Anmuth'ge, und wer, so reizend anzuseh'n ?
In welchem zweck genaht also, woher bist du gekommen auch ?
Ob du von deiser Einöde die Göttin, oder Apsaras,
Solches verkünde mir sämmtlich, und warum du allhier verweilst ? "

[2] *Hidimba's Tod*, vierter Gesang :—
" Umsonst von Menschenfleish lebend ! umsonst gemästet, schnöder Wicht !
Umsonst ! du bist des Tods würdig ! Umsonst ! sterben musst du sogleich."

Hidimbā bowed gratefully before Yudhisthira, the god of justice. Then humbly and imploringly, she endeavoured to win over Kuntī. She was alone, without support, without protector To save Bhīma, she had lost a brother and forsaken her family and her race. She would die, if now he, for whom she had sacrificed everything, repulsed her

May Kuntī, wife and mother, pity the love that drew her towards her son. Hidimbā would even consent to be her slave, she, the princess of the Rākshasas ; only let the mother of the Pāndus unite her to Bhīma. Let the daughter of the forest spend some happy days with her young husband, in its enchanting retreats At any fixed moment, would she give back to Kuntī and to the Pāndavas, him who had given her happiness, during that short time ; but always in her heart and in her thoughts would she follow a family that will have been her own , she would watch over it and shield it in the hour of danger

Moved, convinced by Yudhisthira, who claimed from him the promise to pity the poor artless girl, Bhīma consented to their temporary union. He left his family to follow his wife, who led him away to fairy groves, lying deep amidst the mountains.

After filling him with the pleasures of that delicious retreat, the Rākshasi, faithful to her promise, allowed to depart for ever, him, whom she loved to such a degree as to sacrifice, for his sake, even her love

A son was born from this alliance between the Aryan prince and the non-Aryan. Thus it was that the classic purity of the Indo-European type became adulterated, and the ferocious instincts of the vanquished filtered into the characters of the conquerors

Following the counsels of Vyāsa, the Pāndavas sought a refuge with a Brāhman of Ekachakrā. They did not bind themselves to the regular life of cities Dressed in religious garb, they went through forest and open country, receiving the alms that every devout Hindu owes to the *bhramachārī*.[1]

[1] This is the name borne by the Brāhman during his novitiate ; he must consecrate his time to study, renunciation and begging Marriage is for him the second period of his religious life He then becomes Grihastha, master of the house During the third period, he lives in the forests he is Vanaprastha, anchorite During the fourth and last period, he begs again for his subsistence from the pious charity of other castes, he is Bhikhu, religious mendicant

They brought back to their mother every evening the gains of the day; Kuntī giving half of it to Bhīma, the athlete of the devouring appetite, divided the other half between her other sons.

For some time the fugitives lived in this quietude. One day the Pāndavas went out in search of their daily food. For once Bhīma had remained with his mother. A sound of sobs and broken voices struck the ear of the princess. These groans came from the chamber occupied by the Brāhman's family. Kuntī was a woman, and grief attracted her there, either to share it or to relieve it.

What joy would she feel, she said to Bhīma, to console the virtuous Brāhman, to give him happiness in exchange for the generous hospitality that he had extended to them! Bhīma understood his mother's wish, and hers became his own; but they both should know first of all what the danger was that they must meet and overcome.

The cries of despair becoming more and more heart-rending, the princess entered the Brāhman's apartment, and, herself unobserved, saw and heard everything.

An imminent peril was hanging over the family; its members were disputing over the supreme happiness of dying, one for the others.

The Brāhman was cursing life, that inexhaustible well-head of tears, from which man yet always hopes to draw happiness.

"As for myself, thou knowest it, O Brāhmanī," he added, "I have spoken in these terms to thee before: 'Let us go where happiness attends us!'—but thou wouldest not listen: 'Here was I born—here have I grown up; here still lives my father.'

"Thy aged father has departed hence for heaven; so, too, has thy mother, as well as thy nearest relations, whom thou countedst upon once. What gain we by living longer here? Thou, who lovedst thy parents, but hast not listened to my voice, thou hast been stricken by the parents' deaths, and these deaths have been for myself also the cause of profound affliction.

"To-day my own death is preparing, for I cannot consent, like a selfish and cruel man, to deliver up one of mine to death, that I myself might continue to live.

"O thou whom I chose lawfully, and whom I married after

the sacred rites, virtuous and humble-spirited woman, always resembling my mother! Friend, given to me by the Devas, for a constant and supreme refuge, and bestowed on me by thy parents for a partner in my duties as head of the house! Thou, noble alike in birth and conduct, thou, the mother of my children; no, I could not sacrifice thee to save my own life, my good wife, irreproachable and devoted!"[1]

But could he sacrifice this son, a frail child who has barely left his cradle, and in whom rests the eternal salvation of his ancestors and of himself? Could he sacrifice this daughter, who diffuses in her home a perfume of innocence and of joy, this daughter, who might herself give him the Putra, the deliverer from hell? But if he, their father, dies, what would become of the orphans? Oh! that death would take them altogether; that was his last hope.

The voice of his wife was then heard, firm, stern, and yet consoling.

Why should the Brāhman despair like a man of an inferior caste? What mattered death to one who knows the secret of life?

"With all thy wisdom, repel the desolation threatening to overwhelm thee. It is I who will go!"

The sacrifice of herself to conjugal love was the unfailing duty of the wife. The voluntary death of the Brāhmanī would assure her a glorious fame here below and an eternal recompense on high, and draw down the benedictions of heaven upon her husband's head.

"Thou hast obtained from myself, O Brāhman, what is expected from a spouse, a daughter and a son, here they are. I am then free to-day from all debt to thee! Now, thou hast the strength to feed and protect these two children, whilst I, left alone, should be incapable of either defending or supporting them!"

Deprived of the head of the house, who was their moral strength and their material security, the widow and the orphans would die.

"Let *me* go, O venerable man, but do *thou* protect my two children!"

[1] *Des portraits de femmes dans la poésie épique de l'Inde.* Fragments of moral and literary studies from the Mahābhārata, by Félix Neve; Brussels, 1858.

Besides, what danger was she incurring ? The honour of the Rākshasas even forbade them to kill a woman ! Let the Brāhman, by another marriage, undertake fresh duties. Let him, by continuing to live, save her two children from death !

The Brāhman clasped his wife to his bosom, and they were mingling together their tears, when the young girl, her heart rent at the spectacle of their grief, raised her gentle voice :—

" Why, in this depth of grief do you weep, as if there is no resource left ? Listen to my voice and you will take heart. It is in all justice that I should sacrifice myself for you . . . let me sacrifice myself, as I ought in justice to, and let all the others be saved by myself alone ! "

It would not be by bringing into the world a Putra, the deliverer from hell, that she would open heaven to the spirits of her ancestors, but it would be by preserving, through her death, the life of her father and of her brother, that she would assure to her ancestors, the Srāddhas, the funeral sacrifices, by which their souls, snatched from the mournful prospect of transmigration, would enjoy a happy eternity.

" A son is another self, a spouse is a friend, but a daughter is a source of affliction ; be delivered from this affliction, and leave me free to fulfil a duty ! What will happen if you die ? From the moment you leave me, O my father, I shall be only a pitiable orphan robbed of her protector, wandering from place to place "

She continued speaking, but her voice was lost in tears, and deep groans rent the bosoms of her father and mother. The son, with his beautiful large eyes, gazing at his weeping family, attempted to utter with a voice hardly able to articulate, what his heart inspired him with, and, with the charming involuntary hesitation that gives to the language of infancy such artless, touching grace, he seemed to announce salvation to those who offered the sacrifice of their life. " Do not weep my father, and do not cry my mother, or you my sister ! " And, like a bright ray of sunshine darting across dark clouds, he started into the middle of the group, seized a blade of grass and cried with triumphant joy. " I shall kill that Rākshasa, the man-eater, with this ! "

It was the bud opening under the influence of the fecundating breeze, of life-giving light ; it was the soul of the child in the

act of being born to the noble sentiments whose pure atmosphere it breathed, whose gentle warmth it received.

At that cry of happiness, at that transport truly sublime in its artless simplicity, the afflicted ones felt their grief dissipated for the moment. It was too much. Kuntī could resist the inclination of her heart no longer, and stepped forward. What was the cause of so much dismay and grief? What peril threatened their hosts?

It was this. A Rākshasa had laid a horrible tax upon the country. Every family in its turn was obliged to furnish him with a man for his food, and that day it was the Brāhman's turn to pay that cruel tribute. Kuntī's resolution is taken. A wife, a daughter, and a child, should not redeem their own lives with the price of their protector's. Kuntī has five sons; one of them shall go.

The Brāhman energetically refuses the generous offer. He would never consent to deliver up the head of a guest and of a Brāhman, instead of his own. It would be cowardice, it would be a crime. But Kuntī, aware of the Pāndavas's strength, firmly adhered to her decision; Bhīma shall be the devoted one.

When the Pāndavas returned, they shuddered at the danger to which their brother was going rashly to expose himself. Yudhisthira went secretly to his mother, and asked her to what impulse it was that Bhīma had yielded.

"It is by my order, O conqueror of enemies," replied the princess, "that he will fulfil a great duty for the salvation of a Brāhman, and for the deliverance of this town!"

Yudhisthira severely reproached his mother for compromising the life of their dearest defender. Had misfortune weakened Kuntī's intellectual faculties? No, it was not to death, but to victory that the noble woman sent her child, for she remembered Bhīma's former exploits.

"The strength of Bhīma was well known to me, O son of Pāndu! When I formed the plan of serving this Brāhman, what decided me was not passion, nor ignorance, nor folly; it was a sense of duty under which my resolution was taken. Will not two advantages result from it to ourselves, O Yudhisthira? The discharge of the debt of gratitude for hospitality received, and the performance of an act of the highest virtue."

By defending a holy cause, Bhīma would make himself worthy of heaven. Kuntī wished it, and so must it be. And Yudhis-

thira, the king of justice, bowed before the heroic decision of his mother.

On the morrow, the inhabitants of Ekachakrā saw, lying in the dust, the corpse of the Rākshasa. To whom did they owe their deliverance? They were in ignorance of it, for the Pāndavas, fearing to be recognized, had enjoined on their host the greatest secrecy about the matter.

After these adventures, the Pāndavas assisted at the Swayamvara of Draupadī,[1] where Arjuna won from his kingly rivals the altar-born virgin[2] The attitude of the Pāndavas at the Swayamvara of the beautiful Pānchālian maiden, revealed their brilliant personality. Dhritarāshtra joyfully learnt that the nephews, whom he had been mourning, were yet alive, and still worthy of their race He called them to him, and divided his kingdom between them and his sons The centre of Yudhisthira's dominion was established at Indraprastha, the ancient Delhi Thanks to his conquests and those of his brother, his suzerainty was recognized, in a *rājasūya* or royal sacrifice, by the kings whom the Pāndavas had vanquished Here is seen revealed the great figure of Krishna, the sovereign of Mathurā, whom the marvellous legendary transformed into an incarnation of Vishnu Arjuna had just married, after the Rākshasic rite, the beautiful Subhadrā, the sister of that prince, and Krishna, forgiving the friend whom he tenderly loved, had himself brought her back to Indraprastha, and had countenanced by his presence the royal sacrifice

This, however, was only an interlude in the melancholy destiny of the Pāndavas

The royal family of Hastināpura had been assisting at the *rājasūya*, and the triumph of Yudhisthira had ulcerated the sore with which jealousy had infected the heart of Duryōdhana. That prince was pining away His uncle Sakuni, offered to destroy the Pāndavas by a terrible weapon—gambling—that feverish passion which had already, as we have seen, devoured the Aryans in the Vedic period. Duryōdhana accepted the offer with joy, and the Pāndavas were invited to the court of Hastināpura.

[1] See 1st pt, Chap II

[2] Draupadī was born like her mother from the flame of sacrifice. She was an incarnation of Lakshmī She was also termed Krishnā, the black one, because the smoke from the fire had darkened her skin

Yudhisthira, ensnared, madly, frantically staked his riches, his kingdom, his brothers, and even himself. "Won . . . ! Won . . . ! Won . . . !" cried Sakuni, at each cast. What could he, the king of justice, blinded by a delirious passion, stake now? He staked Draupadī, the innocent, the altar-born! The elders, who witnessed that scandal, rose and manifested their indignation by cries and tears. The joy of the Kurus burst forth. "Won!" exclaimed once more Sakuni, "and for the last time!" [1]

By order of Duryōdhana, his brother Duhsāsana dragged Draupadī by her hair into the midst of that noble assemblage Distracted by shame, trembling with anger, tears were her only defence Who would now protect her? Slaves? for such was the only title that would in future belong to the sons of Pāndu. Then a prayer, not uttered forth by her lips, but cried forth from within her heart, rose up to Vishnu: "O thou, who, under the form of Krishna, art loved by the milk-maids— The Kurus insult me; dost thou not see it, O god of the flowing locks? . . . Me, who am about to be drowned in the ocean of their insults, sustain me, O thou adored by mortals! O Krishna, Krishna, O, thou the great ascetic, O thou soul of the world, save me, and let me not perish in the midst of the Kurus." And Krishna, discomposed and moved to pity, heard that supreme appeal, and by a miracle, manifested his presence . . .

. . . . .

An indescribable emotion electrified the assembly, from whence arose a chorus of praises and cries of admiration in honour of the insulted princess. But Bhīma, transported with vehement anger, exclaimed in a voice that shook the hearts of the listeners and froze them with terror: "Remember well the words which I am about to pronounce, O warriors who inhabit the earth, words which no man ever yet uttered, and which no other can utter but me!—And if, after uttering them, I fail to carry them out, O masters of the earth, may I never attain the place to which my ancestors have gone!— Of this sinner, of this perverse madman, who dishonours the family—I swear to drink his blood after I have crushed his heart in combat."

[1] *Études sur l'Inde ancienne et moderne*, by M. Théodore Pavie. (*Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 15th April, 1857)

He was bound to remember that oath, of which Draupadī would have reminded him if necessary.

Dhritarāshtra shuddered. He called Draupadī to him, and left her to choose the favour that he wished to grant her. Still breathless from anger, she claimed her liberty, and that of the Pāndavas Let them return to their kingdom, and she would be satisfied! And the old monarch acceded to her prayer.

The Kauravas offered Yudhisthira the opportunity of revenging himself; and forgetting his first and fatal experience, the raja plays again. If he loses, the Pāndavas and Draupadī will exile themselves. They will spend twelve years in the forests, and a thirteenth where they choose, but still disguised and unknown That last condition being fulfilled—and this the Kurus promise themselves to prevent—then only will the sons of Pāndu, relieved from their oath, be at liberty to return to their country and take once more their proper rank.

And Yudhisthira loses again.

When the Pāndavas were departing, Arjuna temporarily left his brothers and his wife, in order to obtain, by the exercise of austerities, those divine weapons by which he would be able to defeat the Kurus when the day of vengeance arrived. At the end of his penance, which he fulfilled on the snowy summits of the Himālayas, and after he had fought, in disguise of a mountaineer, against Shiva, he was transported to Svarga in Indra's chariot. But neither that Immensity, peopled with myriads of stars and with the souls of the happy ones; nor the leafy arches of the Nandana, beneath which the Apsaras played, and where, by an affecting allegory the sweet odour of the virtues mingled with that of the flowers, nor the love of his father Indra—could make him forget the place of ordeal where his brothers were suffering, and where his mother was still living After having resisted the most enrapturing temptations to remain there, he redescended to the earth.[1]

In the old country of the Aryans, not far from the river Sarasvati, under the shades of the forest of Kāmyaka, the Pāndavas passed the long years of exile, to which by their own fault they had been condemned They employed themselves in hunting the wild beasts, and that adventurous and inde-

[1] This episode has been translated by M Bopp, cf *Ardschuna's Reise zu Indra's Himmel*, Berlin, 1824

pendent life pleased their proud and energetic character They were free, and aware of their own strength.

The Pāndavas were one day engaged in a hunt, the produce of which they had destined for the Brāhmans who had accompanied them in their exile, and to whose care they had confided their companion Suddenly, an unaccustomed sound was heard in the forest Jayadratha, the king of the Sindhus and Sauvīras, was crossing it with a princely escort. He was in search of a wife, although he was already united by marriage to the daughter of Gāndhārī.

Just then, standing on the threshold of the hermitage was Draupadī, in her dazzling beauty, in her severe yet seductive grace, " lighting up the depths of the wood as the lightning illuminates the dark cloud " [1] Was she a celestial virgin, an Apsara, or a Māyā, an illusion created by the gods to deceive mortals ? Jayadratha wished to know who she was, and sent king Kotikāsya to her, whom he was already hoping to have for a wife

Draupadī, on seeing the royal messenger coming quickly towards her on a chariot, seized, it might have been through alarm, a branch of the kadamba [2]

Reassured by the stranger, who, with courteous deference, stated his name and those of the illustrious travellers whom he showed to her in the distance, the young woman, dropping the branch that she had tightly clasped in her terror, enveloped herself in the silky folds of her robe, and answered Kotikāsya with a dignity softened down by an expression of goodwill

" O son of a king, the more I think of it, the more I feel convinced that a woman such as I am, ought not to speak with thee. But there is here no one, neither man, nor woman to answer thee, for I am now here all alone. Therefore, I consent to speak Listen then to me Were it otherwise, how should I, alone in the forest, dare to speak to thee, devoted as I am to my sense of duty ? "

Then telling her own name, and the names of her absent companions, she invited the royal escort, in the name of the Pāndavas, to rest at the hermitage. While Draupadī was arranging her humble home for the reception of the noble

[1] *Fragments from the Mahābhārata*, translated from the Sanskrit into French by A Sadous

[2] *Nauclea orientalis.*

guests going to stop there, Jayadratha, who had been informed by Kotikāsya of the result of his mission, entered the hermitage. It was by inquiring with respectful interest, after the health of the Pāndavas, that the king of the Sauvīras accosted the princess. Touched with the kind inquiry, Draupadī answered with grace and sweetness, offered to the king water for his feet, and an abundance of game.

But when at last Jayadratha confessed to her the object of his visit, what a change took place in the young woman's attitude! The blood rushed to her cheeks, fire flashed from her eye, and from her trembling lips came the shocked cry of insulted honour. More beautiful than ever, she upheld her sense of duty, as Sītā had done. But there was a difference between her and the wife of Rāma, grief spoke not through her; anger alone animated her. One admires such noble anger, but it does not inspire that tender interest evoked by the tears of Sītā, the heart-rending appeals addressed to her husband, and to the brother, who could not hear her. Even in the expressions of indignation torn from the queen of Ayodhyā by the insult offered to her virtue, even in her moral strength, there could be divined the natural weakness of a woman.

Draupadī did not weep, and when Jayadratha, irritated by her menacing scornful attitude, said: "Use supplicating words, and you will regain favour with the king of the Sauvīras," it was with a majestic mixture of pride, irony, and firmness, that she answered him in the following words: "I am strong, but the king of the Sauvīras considers I am very weak. Thinks he that his violence moves me? I shall hold no supplicatory talk with the king of the Sauvīras . . .

She fixed a defiant look upon him, and called to Dhaumya, the purohita, or domestic priest; she even repulsed the monarch, who had seized her robe to drag her away But at the very moment when she had prostrated herself before the purohita, who had run up on hearing her cries, she was forced into the chariot of her captor A sigh heaved her bosom, but she waited with resignation a prompt deliverance.

That expectation was not deceived. The Pāndavas, whose return to the hermitage had been hastened by gloomy forebodings, were told by a female attendant of Draupadī of the outrage they had suffered in the person of their companion. They rushed forward, following the traces of the ravisher;

reached him; and, single-handed, against all the princes and their suite, they fought, struck down, and killed men, elephants, horses; abandoning the bloody corpses as food to the birds of prey, attracted thither by the odour of the carnage. Jayadratha, leaving Draupadī behind on the field of battle, fled into the depths of the forest.

Yudhisthira refused to kill him, as he was the husband of his cousin Dushalā, sister of his mortal enemies. "In the name of Dushalā and of the glorious Gāndhārī, one must not," he said, "kill the king of the Sindhus, however perverse he may be."

Draupadī's part is here devoid of that magnanimity which pardons a conquered enemy Overwrought at the thought of the danger that she had escaped, she incited the Pāndavas, with savage energy, to complete her vengeance. "Even if he begs for his life from you after an encounter, never spare him." The rājā, Yudhisthira, brought her back to the hermitage, while Bhīma and Arjuna pursued the king of the Sindhus, and overtook him. Bhīma, whose violence was the blind instrument of Draupadī, was about to kill him, when the generous Arjuna, holding back his arm, reminded him of the command of their eldest brother

Yudhisthira and Draupadī saw the young king return in chains, and with his head shorn "Let him be freed," said Yudhisthira But Bhīma answered "Let Draupadī say the word. This wretch is the slave of the sons of Pāndu" Draupadī remained silent Yudhisthira reiterated his command The young woman glanced at the merciful king of justice, and, once more mistress over herself, she repeated his words, addressing herself to Bhīma. "Free this man, whom, from being a king, thou hast made a slave"

When the twelve years of exile in the forest had expired, the Pāndavas were obliged by their compact with Duryōdhana to live one year still concealing their identity. They spent that time at the court of the Virāta, king of Matsya, in such disguises as were far from betraying the nobility of their origin.

During a campaign of the king of Matsya, Duryōdhana and his allies invaded his territory and carried off numerous heads of cattle. Bhūmimjaya, son of Virāta, sunk in the pleasures of his gynæceum, was informed of the mishap by the head-shepherd, who called upon him to unfold his royal banner

with the golden lion, and to capture the precious booty from the authors of the raid. The young prince, a coward and a boaster, was proud of being called to the battle before all his womankind, and vaunted he would, single-handed, defeat the whole of the enemy's army. But alas! how could he do it? The charioteer who ought to have driven his chariot had just been killed, and Bhūmimjaya, though fretting impatiently against this check to his warlike ardour, could not begin his march without first replacing this indispensable auxiliary. The dancing-master, Brihannala, had eagerly listened to the words of Bhūmimjaya; it was Arjuna so disguised. He saw in this incident an opportunity of quitting his vile woman's dress for the cuirass, of avenging himself upon his enemies, and of becoming once more prince and Kshattriya.

"And as the time fixed by his vow had now elapsed, he addressed himself to his beloved spouse,[1] Drupada's daughter, the delicate Pānchālian, born of the altar, a woman truthful, sincere, pleased in being agreeable to her husband; and he who knows all things, in his joy at what he has just heard, said secretly to Draupadī. 'Go quickly from me, O thou who art beautiful, and say, in speaking of me to the son of Virāta: This person lately was the favourite charioteer of Arjuna; he is robust, with full experience gained in great battles, and he will know how to drive the chariot.'"[2]

Draupadī entered at the moment when Bhūmimjaya, complacently comparing himself to Arjuna before his female audience, was letting loose his bravado with the utmost boasting and bragging Eager to put an end to such a comparison, which offended her, she hastened to emblazon Brihannala's skill before his eyes, and the prince charged his sister Uttarā to implore the services of the precious servitor. The young girl hastened to Arjuna. Her artless and striking gracefulness, her quick and lively mind, are lovingly described by the poet. She paused near him to whom she owed the talents which added their charm to her beauty, and Brihannala smiled upon his dear pupil.

"What brings thee here, beautiful woman with the golden necklace, woman with eyes of the gazelle? Why comest thou

[1] Draupadī was employed as sempstress in the palace of Virāta

[2] *Fragments from the Mahābhārata*, translated from the French by Theod. Pavie, Paris, Benjamin Duprat, 1844.

running? Why lookest thou so anxious? Tell me quickly, O young girl!"

With charming freedom, Uttarā informed her faithful servant of her brother's request "And," she added, "if thou grantest not the request I am making, and at his loving invitation, it will cost me my life" The Pāndava bounded with joy, and the young girl, delighted with the success of the step she had taken, never suspected, on seeing Brihannala's anxiety to please her, what the secret motives were which had so electrified Arjuna. Accompanied with wishes of good augury, from the women and the young girls of the palace, the prince and his charioteer quitted the town Arjuna's bravery, to which the cowardice of Bhūmimjaya gave an additional lustre, enabled them to triumph over the enemy, and procured for the royal prince the enthusiastic praises of the charming choir of virgins which, led by Uttarā, had gone out to meet him.

Shortly afterwards, Virāta learnt who the avenger of his kingdom was, and offered his daughter to the hero whose name and rank had been revealed to him; but the latter refused the offer: not long since had his office called him to the gynæceum, under his superintendence had Uttarā been initiated into the arts of dancing and singing; she loved and venerated him as her instructor But Arjuna asked for, and obtained, the hand of the princess for his son Abhimanyu [1] Thus he would always be able to cherish as a father the young girl who had come to trust him like a daughter

The alliance of the king of Matsya was of valuable assistance to the Pāndavas, who, released from their oath, were now preparing to return to their country, vengeance in their hearts and weapons in their hands. Both sides prepared for war, while at the same time negotiations were being conducted All India was up in arms, divided between the rival branches of the royal family, who were shortly to dispute each other's supremacy over it Krishna, whom the same ties of relationship united to the Kauravas and to the Pāndus, endeavoured in vain to bring about a reconciliation between the two collateral branches Draupadī, as well as her brother, the king of the Pānchālas, rejected all idea of peace [2] She could not

[1] Abhimanyu was the issue of the marriage between Arjuna and Subhadrā, Krishna's sister

[2] Cf Monier Williams, *Indian Epic Poetry*, 1863.

forget the insults heaped upon her by the sons of Dhritarāshtra, ever since that first scene of gambling, when Yudhisthira lost everything, even his liberty. Bhīma also remembered his oath. Too many insults had been offered them, too much grief had made their hearts bleed within them, too many desires for vengeance had been cherished for long years by them, to make it possible for the Pāndavas to join hands with their treacherous enemies, without any afterthought. Besides, had they not learnt by previous experience how precarious such a reconciliation would be?

The moment for the explosion was now imminent.

Krishna made one final attempt He repaired to Hastināpura, went to Kuntī, and offered peace to the Kauravas, as for the last time. They assembled and deliberated. Dhritarāshtra, Bhīshma, Vidura, and Drona hoped for a reconciliation, but Duryōdhana, rejecting every proposal, left the council hall, and his brothers followed him. They then had recourse to Gāndhārī's mediation, hoping that the pious and holy woman would exercise a gentle and beneficent influence over that violent and bitter spirit; they believed that it belonged to the mother's hand to touch, without rending further, the wound that was rankling in Duryōdhana's heart. At the queen's voice, the prince came back, but when Gāndhārī implored him to share his kingdom with his cousins, his anger knew no bounds, and he left the hall a second time [1]

In vain Krishna attempted to draw Karna to the Pāndavas before leaving Hastināpura, in vain Kuntī, revealing his birth to her son, implored him not to commit a fratricidal crime. Karna, at first undecided, yielded to a false point of honour. He would remain faithful to the Kurus; but he would avoid fighting with any other Pāndava but Arjuna in battle It was a remembrance of the tournament at Hastināpura.

Then began that terrible struggle which the poet has described with such striking vigour, and painted in colours of such gloomy splendour, that the imagination deeply and weirdly struck by it, long preserves its melancholy impression. The two parties met in the Field of the Law,[2] the Kurukshetra. Bhīsma, the uncle of Pāndu and Dhritarāshtra, had accepted with regret the command of the Kuru army. He had just sent

[1] Ibid.

[2] *Dharmakshetra* in Sanskrit, another name for this battle-field.

forth a prolonged war-cry, the signal for the battle in which his great-nephews were to kill one another. Conch-shells, timbals, fifes, tambourines, resound on all sides.

It was a solemn moment. Arjuna felt the need of reflection; he begged Krishna, who guided his chariot, to take him between the two armies. At the sight of the relations and friends he was about to fight, the indomitable hero was deeply moved; his eyes filled with tears, and he felt his courage failing. For whom would one desire glory, power, and riches, if it was not for some loved ones? There they were, men whom Arjuna loved, ready to cut one another's throats . . . No, he would not fight, he would not stain himself with blood that was his own. It would be better to die innocent than to live guilty! Besides, what consequences would not this impious struggle entail!

"The ruin of a family causes the ruin of the eternal religion of that family, religion destroyed, the entire family is invaded by irreligion Through irreligion, O Krishna, the women of the family become corrupted, and from corruption of women, O Shepherd, is born the confusion of castes. And, by this confusion hell receives the fathers of the murderers and of all their family, deprived of the offering of cakes and water . . !"[1]

Discouraged, Arjuna sat dejected in the chariot, and from his trembling hands fell the bow and arrow. Then, in one of the most sublime hymns that their spiritual instincts ever inspired the Aryan people, the Bhagavad-Gītā, the Song of the Blessed One, Krishna strengthened the soul of the hero, and made it soar serenely above human passions. Why should not family ties be sacrificed to the idea of right? Why should one dread to kill? The soul does not die, it is immortal

And then, in magnificent lyric strains, Krishna explains the doctrine of Yōga, of the union with the eternal principle of life a saddening doctrine, a prelude to Buddhism, but to which one cannot deny a high moral elevation To aspire to identify oneself with the Universal Soul— that was to deny any human individuality—that was pantheism, that was fatalism, to make man indifferent either to pleasure or to pain, was to deprive him of that faculty of perception, the source alike of the most delicious as of the most harrowing emotions, to isolate man

[1] The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, or the Song of the Blessed Indian poem published by the Academy of Stanislas, translated by M Emile Burnouf, Nancy, Ve Raybois, 1861 (See also the English translation in the Scott Library)

from his fellows was to shut his heart against love and pity, and to tear him away from the holy joys of the domestic hearth. But this doctrine, in severing him from earthly ties, purified his instincts, armed him against the seductiveness of passion, and at last spiritualized him. And, besides, was it so completely a doctrine of inaction that proclaimed this ever sublime truth ?—

"It is not by inaction that one can attain the object of life!" [1]

What a spectacle was that presented by the battlefield after the victory of the Pāndavas! The conquerors had fallen asleep Three men were creeping into their camp; they were all that remained of the Kuru army. Aswatthāman, Drona's son, to avenge his father's death, entered every tent, and silently killed kings, princes, soldiers The women came out of their tents, and, mad with terror, pointed out to those whom their cries attracted to the spot, a man of superhuman height, running wherever there was an enemy to strike.

"There," they sobbed, "there he is fleeing away at a gallop! Rākshasa or mortal, we know not who he is! After killing the king of the Pānchālas he has remounted his chariot, and there he stands upright!" [2]

Those who were awake, defended themselves in vain. The icy finger of death was laid on them, for Shiva, the destroying principle, had himself armed Aswatthāman, and his wife Dūrga was accompanying the assassin: "Then Kālī (a manifestation of Dūrga) with face and eyes red with blood, with girdle and garlands stained with blood, with garments all dripping with blood, a cord in her hand, showed herself visibly like to a woman of the people. this Kālarātrī—this Night of the Last Destruction —descending from on high, marched on singing, tying up with terrible knots of her cord, men, horses, elephants . . ." Fantastic beings, Pisāchas, Indian vampires, and Rākshasas eagerly followed the murderer, and devoured the throbbing limbs severed by the sword of Drona's son.

[1] M Cousin has analysed the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in his *General History of Philosophy*; Paris, 1863 His is the eloquent voice which always taught the union of the beautiful ideal with the beautiful practical, and which here protests against the abuses of a doctrine, that taught the entire abdication of self, in order to unite man with the Supreme Being

[2] *Fragments from the Mahābhārata*, translated by M. Th. Pavie.

Meanwhile, the companions of Aswatthāman have not been inactive, and the flame of the fire they lighted shed its ruddy beams upon the fantastic scene. The death of the sons of Dhritarāshtra, and the annihilation of their army were now avenged; for their enemies, their minds distracted by sleep and terror, struck at one another in the darkness, and so completed Aswatthāman's work. Since that gloomy night, Dūrga has often been seen, tying up with her cords the disarmed heroes, and dragging them after her with Aswatthāman always with her

Draupadī has seen her five sons killed, killed in the very midst of victory, by a cowardly and barbarous attack. Here again, it is the desire for vengeance that cries the loudest in her maternal heart: Bhīma must kill Aswatthāman and bring to Draupadī the precious stone that decks the forehead of her children's murderer[1]

Bhīma, followed by his brothers and Krishna, pursues Aswatthāman who, from afar sees them coming, and shoots at them the arrow named Brahmasiras, an enchanted weapon that he had received from his father Drona, with which, without the intervention either of the Rishis, or of Nārada or of Vyāsa, he was about to set fire to the three worlds They order Aswatthāman to detach from his forehead the jewel that Bhīma has promised himself to take away, after making him a corpse. Drona's son obeys, and Bhīma sends that token of submission to the proud and vindictive Draupadī[1]

At the end of this episode, an entire book the Strīparva, is dedicated to the lamentations of the women.

Side by side, Gāndhārī and Kuntī seek, one with the other, for some alleviation for their pain. Gāndhārī sees in her sister-in-law, not the woman who had given birth to the murderers of her children, she sees in her the mother, who, like her, also bewails the loss of a dear progeny. Both, followed by women who had also lost relations in the war accompany Dhritarāshtra on his mournful tour round the scene of the disaster. On the way, the avengers of the Kurus, Aswatthāman and his two companions, meet the sad procession. One of them, Kripa, uncle of Aswatthāman, addressing himself to the heroic instincts of Gāndhārī, glorifies the fate

[1] Monier Williams, *Indian Epic Poetry*.

of those who had fallen on the field of honour; and, as he consoles her by telling her of the glory that they had won, he recalls to her mind the words from the Purānas: "To be killed fighting, that is the best way of death for Kshattriyas, . . . then weep thou not for their deaths."[1]

Aswatthāman and his accomplices retire, dreading to face the vengeance of the Pāndavas whom they see approaching.

A sad triumph is this for Yudhisthira and his brothers. Draupadī and the Pānchālas accompany them, tortured by grief. Women who were on the route taken by the new raja, exclaimed with sobs. "Where now is the recognition of kingly duty? Where now is that virtue, which avoids murder?"

Then came the interview of the Pāndavas with the father of those whom they had killed,—with the uncle who had lately loved them—a touching interview, but one whose impression was soon to be surpassed by another scene. The Pāndavas had gone to Gāndhārī The poor mother, beside herself, losing her greatness of soul, was on the point of cursing the raja, to whom the corpses of her sons had served as steps to mount the throne Vyāsa, her father-in-law, stopped her, and recalled to her mind the vow she had made before the battle. "Where right obtains, there ought victory to be!" Were those words forgotten that she had pronounced in the conviction of their justice, of their truth?

"Thou who wast always patient at other times, why dost thou not pardon to-day? Triumph over injustice, thou who knowest the law; where right obtains, there ought victory to be!"

"O blessed one," said the queen, "I neither curse them nor desire their ruin! Through the violence of my grief for my son I feel my soul stagger The sons of Kuntī must be protected as much by me as by her . . ."

She knew that her children were the aggressors, she knew that they were guilty. If Duryōdhana had been killed in fair fight it would have been in accordance with the rights of war. But could she forget that it was by a foul trick, unworthy of a Kshattriya, that Bhīma had killed the invulnerable Duryōdhana? Bhīma, humble and trembling, endeavoured to justify

[1] *The Mahābhārata.* Eleven episodes drawn from this epic poem, translated for the first time from Sanskrit into French, by P E Foucaux; Paris, Benjamin Duprat, 1862.

himself. The memory of that gambling scene, where he had vowed to avenge Draupadī—that bitter memory had confused his reason and had led astray his arm.

Then Gāndhārī's thoughts turn to her husband whose infirmity is willingly shared by the pious wife. "Thou," says she to her nephew, "thou who hast killed the hundred sons of this old man, O, invincible (supposing he had reproached thee lightly), why didst thou not spare one single member of our family to us, old couple, deprived of our kingdom? Does even one single staff remain to support an old and blind couple?"

That heart-rending idea woke in her the memory of the new successor to Dhritarāshtra, and changed her groans into a burst of indignation. "Where then is the king?" she demanded. Overwhelmed with violent emotion, Yudhisthira advanced. He knelt down before her, and thus confessed his guilt: "I, Yudhisthira, I, even I, am the perverted murderer of thy sons, O queen! I am the cause of the destruction of this earth, I deserve to be cursed: curse me, then!"

Now, after having killed his relations, what will he do with a kingdom? This spirit of resignation deeply stirred Gāndhārī's heart. She gazed for a moment at the princes, unhappy in the midst of their victory . . . "Whilst they were thus troubled," continues the poet, "Gāndhārī, whose anger had passed away, went to them, one by one, consoling them as if she had been their own mother."

Is there anything more sublime than this last action?

With the tender prescience of a woman and of a mother, Gāndhārī guessed that her nephews must be desiring to quench their grief on the bosom of Kuntī, and she sent them to her. For thirteen years Kuntī had not pressed her children to her heart. But alas, what bitterness in this interview! Reunion entailed more evils than separation had. Draupadī lay stretched upon the ground, dying through grief for the death of her sons. Kuntī raised her in her arms and gave her the most affectionate attention. When she came to herself, Draupadī, not seeing the Pāndavas, said to their mother: "They do not come to meet thee to-day, thee, whom they have not seen for so long, given up to penitence. As for me, deprived of my sons, what have I to do with royalty?"

In her turn, Gāndhārī endeavoured to comfort the suffering soul of Draupadī; and the resignation of her words showed

how her human feelings had been sacrificed to heroic virtue: "Do not be thus, my daughter; thou who art afflicted, look at me, likewise afflicted. I think that this destruction of men has been caused by the will of Time. An inevitable event which makes one's hair to stand on end, has spontaneously happened . . . Weep not, for what has happened is the inevitable! They are not to be pitied who have gone to their deaths, fighting. Such as thou art, such am I; and who will console us both?" Voluntarily blind, Gāndhārī had, according to the legend, received from Vyāsa the gift of second-sight. This woman was all mind Thus, from afar, she pictured to herself the field of battle in all its horrible aspect, and from near, her divine eyesight embraced all, of which the bandage deprived her of the material view.

Krishna was near Gāndhārī, listening to her eloquent commentary on the scenes that were desolating the Kurukshetra. She pointed out to him the widows of the warriors; some crying and giving themselves up to noisy despair; some, lying senseless in the dust, others, more happy, destined never again to awake from their deadly swoon; others again, searching eagerly for the remains of those they had loved, but unable even to recognize their faces, half-devoured by the birds of prey. "Seeing," said Gāndhārī, "seeing bodies without heads and heads without bodies, some women, rejoicing with a horrible joy at the sight, became distracted to madness. After placing a head to a body, and gazing, without heeding or seeing what they were doing, 'it is another head we want here, this head does not belong to this body,' said they, weeping. Piecing together arms, legs, feet, pierced with arrows and scattered about, these wretched women, overwhelmed with grief, were fainting at each step."

Here Gāndhārī suddenly stopped; she had recognized the corpse of her son, Duryōdhana, and had fainted. When she returned to herself she bathed with her tears, and pressed to her bosom, him who had drawn thence his sustenance, but who was now but a senseless corpse. Then, turning to Krishna, she repeated the prophetic words that she had uttered to Duryōdhana when he questioned her upon the issue of the battle. The just cause had triumphed. Her son, whose valiant ardour she had directed, had merited the heavenly reward that she had desired for him. "I do not weep for this

son," she added, "I weep for the unfortunate Dhritarâshtra, deprived of his kindred."

She felt deeply at the sight of her daughters-in-law, who but yesterday had been sheltered in the gynæceum, passing along its sumptuous apartments in elegant attire; but who to-day were exposed to the public gaze, and were guarding the corpses of their loved ones from the birds of prey waiting to devour them But it was especially the sight of Duryōdhana's first wife which wrung her heart. The young wife was lamenting her husband and her son, lying near his father. She was wiping away the blood and dust that stained their corpses. "Is she not beautiful, thus occupied in gazing on her son?" added her venerable relation. And proceeding to sketch the lamentable scenes of which Kurukshetra was the theatre; "The sobs of the women, the cries of beasts," continued she, "everything appears to me like a strange play in a theatre."

Her compassion even extended to the widows of her enemies She watched Uttarā,—that bewitching daughter of the king of Virāta, to whom Arjuna had desired to be no more than a father,—now demented, on seeing herself deprived of the young husband to whom she had only been wedded for six months Alarmed at seeing him stretched upon the ground, him, who was accustomed to a soft and scented couch, she had drawn the head of Abhimanyu nearer to herself, and made him a soft pillow upon her heart She implored him to speak and reassure her . . . She thought he was annoyed . . Her reason returned at intervals; and then she comprehended the extent of her misfortune. The soul had quitted her husband's body "Where wilt thou go?" said Uttarā in a sad voice, "Wait for me!" Then she fell into a reverie of the delights of heaven, of the charming Apsaras, who inhabit the groves of the Nandana, and who would make the handsome prince forget the wife who wept for him on earth. And her reverie changed to jealousy . . .

Jayadratha, the ravisher of Draupadī, and son-in-law of Dhritarāshtra, also lay upon the ground, and on seeing the fearfully unnatural calmness of her daughter, Gāndhārī bitterly asked herself, "Why did not the Pāndavas lead their companion to view the body of him whom they had sacrificed to her resentment?"

She saw elsewhere the wife of Drona, the military preceptor

of her sons and her nephews, making a supreme effort to celebrate her husband's obsequies, and receiving near the pyre the funeral homage of the Dwījas, whose spiritual teacher Drona had been.

When through her power of second-sight, she had proceeded thus far in her description of these scenes, she reverted to her own natural self, and at the thought that the flame would only leave her a handful of ashes of what had been her sons, she became once more a wife and a mother. Indignant, with threatening looks, because he had not prevented the meeting of the two armies, she advanced a few steps towards Krishna.

"Since this destruction of the Kurus, desired and suffered by thee, came from thee, O hero—receive now the fruits of it. But if, by my devotion to my husband, I have acquired some merit, by this same merit difficult to obtain, I shall curse thee, thou who bearest the disk and the club. Now that Kurus and Pāndavas, relations, have killed one another, and that thou didst suffer it, O Govinda, thou wilt be the cause why thy own shall perish! As for thee, thirty-six years from now, thy parents killed, thy councillors killed, thy sons killed, and thyself a fugitive in the forest, thou wilt meet thy own death in a most vile manner. And the women, whose sons will be killed, whose allies will be killed, will all be cruelly afflicted, as well as the wife of Bharata!"[1]

The god-king, calm and smiling, firmly reminded her of the sense of duty; but the fulminating prediction of their aunt filled the Pāndavas with terror, and Gāndhārī, exhausted, relapsed into a gloomy silence. The gift of water succeeded that harrowing scene. The banks of the Ganges were covered with a crowd of women, fulfilling that pious duty for the warriors, relations, or friends, who had fallen in the battle.

Karna himself had succumbed, struck down by the hand of Arjuna. Who, besides his women, would perform his funeral ceremony? . . . Kuntī advanced . . . More courageous than at the tournament of Hastināpura, she revealed the celestial origin of him whom she now publicly acknowledged to be her son, and adjured the Pāndavas to celebrate the funeral in honour of their brother. This unexpected revelation overwhelmed the Pāndavas. Karna, the enemy whose bravery they had

[1] King of the Lunar Dynasty, son of Dushmanta and of Sacuntalā, ancestor of the Kurus and Pāndavas.

admired, was now to be, when it was too late, loved and wept by them. It was Kuntī's silence that had made them commit the crime of fratricide; another grief was added to the long series of their sufferings.

"Alas!" said to his mother the king of justice, "it is because thou hast hidden this secret that we are struck down . . . And now that I am mourning for Karna, I feel as if I have been thrown into fire . . ."

He offered the gift of water to Karna's shades, and made the wives of the hero come forward to assist in that last duty. "After having with them performed the funeral ceremony, the virtuous prince rose from the waters of Gangā, his senses still bewildered."

When the Pāndavas returned to Hastināpura, Draupadī shared in their triumph. The women extolled the glory of the princess, whom they compared in their enthusiasm to the spouse of Shiva. Yudhisthira became the father of this people, who had for many long years aspired to live under his laws. One of his first acts of government was to shower benefactions upon the widows of the warriors killed in the Great Battle

The last act of that tragic history bears the impress of a gloomy melancholy Dhritarāshtra, to whom the new raja had been a tender and devoted son, and who had been content to be the first of his subjects, retired with Gāndhārī and Kuntī into the woods, to end there, in meditation and penitence, their much-agitated life One day, as it often happens in tropical countries, the forest took fire. The three aged people did not wish to escape, and sitting down, they waited for the death that should open heaven to them.[1] The misfortunes that Gāndhārī had foretold Krishna, struck down the house of Yadu[2] Krishna's children murdered one another, and he himself, his mind distracted by the malediction of the inspired woman, took part in the carnage Hit at last by a hunter's arrow, he died in the depths of the woods. Dwārakā, his capital, was submerged by the Ocean. Arjuna wished to convey to Indraprastha what remained of his friend's subjects. He charged himself with the guidance and protection of the women on their march; but a weakness that he had never experienced before made his courage fail, and he had the pain

[1] Monier Williams, *Indian Epic Poetry*

[2] Father of the Yādavas, to whose race Krishna belonged.

and shame of seeing the women he sought to defend, captured by marauders.[1]

The heavy hand of time had been laid on him at last.

The Pāndavas, sad and discouraged, turned bitterly away from the earthly grandeur that they had so dearly acquired. They had been deeply wounded in the battles of life, and triumph itself had brought with it only tears. Yudhisthira divided the kingdom between Vajra, the remaining scion of the race of the Yadus, and Parikshit, the son of Abhimanyu and Uttarā, and grandson of Arjuna and Subhadrā.

Yudhisthira said sadly to Subhadrā: "This son of thy son will be king of the Kurus, and Vajra, the only survivor of the Yadus, will be made king. Parikshit will reign at Hastināpura, the descendant of Yadu, at Chakraprastha.[2] The king Vajra ought to be protected by thee. Do not give way to thoughts of injustice!"[3]

The Pāndavas and their companion put on once more their bark garments They were about to enter the forest for the third time. "All the women burst into tears on seeing the departure of these men of the first rank with Draupadī, who came sixth, as once before they had departed, when they had lost at dice" . . .

. . . . . .

"The magnanimous Pāndavas and the virtuous Draupadī, after having fasted, advanced towards the East, fraught with the spirit of devotion, successful in fulfilling the law of self-abnegation. They traversed many countries, crossed many rivers and seas Yudhisthira marched at the head, Bhīma next to him, Arjuna followed, then the two twins; and behind them marched the best of women, the dark Draupadī, of the elegant figure and the lotus eyes. One only dog followed the Pāndavas as they travelled through the forest."

They climbed the slopes of the Himālayas, whose snowy summits mingling with the clouds, appeared to the Hindus to be like the road to heaven. The severe beauty, the calm grandeur, of the places that they looked down upon, filled their souls with pious and austere thoughts. Death is now about to

[1] Cf Monier Williams, *Indian Epic Poetry*.
[2] Indraprastha.
[3] *The Mahābhārata*, see p. 255.

lav his hand on them ! Draupadī is the first to fall. The four youngest Pāndavas succumb successively under the burden of their past errors. Yudhisthira, the king of justice, alone remains to finish the Mahāprasthānika, the Great Journey.

The dog always follows him.

Indra appears to Yudhisthira, and invites him to mount in his chariot: the raja refuses. "Let my fallen brothers there come with me; I will not go without my brothers to heaven, O lord of the gods! Let the tender daughter of the king, deserving happiness, O destroyer of towns, come with us; deign to consent to this."

Indra gives him the assurance that he should find up above, those whom he had loved on earth. Their souls had risen thither; but to him, the king of justice, were due the honours of apotheosis. It was in the body that he should enter the abode of the blessed. Yudhisthira, however, continues to resist, for he will be obliged to separate himself from the poor dog, which has with so much devotion worn itself out to follow him. Then reveals himself to him his father, Dharma, god of justice, who, under the form of that faithful animal, has all this time been accompanying him. When Yudhisthira enters into Swarga, he sees there neither his brothers nor Draupadī, but recognizes Duryōdhana and his most cruel enemies. Heaven has no longer any attractions for him; he desires to go where those were whom he has lost.

A celestial messenger guided him towards the regions inhabited by the other Pāndavas. Thick darkness, tainted odours exhaled from crimes, corpses gnawed by worms, devouring flames, birds of prey, winged monsters, were what struck the senses of Yudhisthira. An impassable stream unrolled its belt of fire, a forest of swords swayed its murderous branches. For the punishment of the wicked were reserved cauldrons of boiling milk and burning oil:—in fact any torture that a delirious imagination could invent, and that man, in the days of his terror dared attribute to a paternal god It was hell, and the Indian poet described its striking horrors in that strange and gloomy language, which would one day be found again on the lips of a Western poet, and would strike terror into the people of the Middle Ages.

Was this the abode of the four Pāndavas and of Draupadī? The rāja, suffocated by the fetid miasma exhaling from the

gulf, is about to withdraw, when groaning voices strike upon his ear. Seized with inexpressible anguish, he listens . . . " Alas ! just king, noble Yudhisthira, pause one moment to allay our pains ! On thy footsteps springs up a wind, pure with the perfume of thy soul, bringing calm to us—this calm waited for so long. Pause here for one instant, illustrious Bhāratide ; for, thou being present, we cease from suffering." [1]

" Alas ! " groans Yudhisthira, pierced with grief. He pauses . . . He thinks he recognizes those voiees, and yet . . . they are no longer the same ! Never had his brothers or Draupadī spoken in such heart-rending accents ! Suddenly the frightful truth dawns upon him . . . Yudhisthira understands it all ; those whom he loved are doomed to hell. For him, he can have, if he desires it, the sight of the Immortals, the scented shades of the forest Nandana, and the delights of heaven ! Well ! these gods, he spurns them ; they are unjust, they are liars ! and these delights, he scorns them ! In the poisoned air that is breathed by his friends, in that place of torture where they are suffering, *there* is his heaven, and there will he remain !

" Go," cries he to the divine messenger, " mount upwards to those whose orders thou obeyest ! As for me, I do not return ; let them see me, remaining here immovable, and may my presence alleviate the torments of my unhappy brothers ! " The messenger of the gods departs swiftly to Swarga, and delivers to his masters the message of the god of justice. Suddenly the horrors of hell disappear, and a radiant light floods the scene. A fresh and scented wind caresses the rāja with its sweetest breath. The Immortals have descended to the infernal regions.

" Hail, magnanimous king," says to Yudhisthira the king of the heavens, " thy work is accomplished , thou hast attained supreme perfection and happy immortality."

This last trial has purified the five Pāndavas and their companion of that slime of earthliness from which, during their life on earth, they had never been able to preserve themselves completely. Now let them sit in the Empyrean, next to

[1] *Poésie héroïque des Indiens*, compared to the Greek and Roman epic poetry, with analysis of the national poems of India, with French quotations and imitations in Latin verse, by F G Eichhoff , Paris, 1860

Karna! Now let Yudhisthira bathe in the sacred Ganges, the supreme purifier of souls!

"He plunges into it and comes out of it, at once freed from his human body and arrayed in an ethereal body, exempt from hatred and weakness; soaring up behind the gods, glorified with hymns by the Rishis, he rises towards the holy assemblage, where the warriors of the two enemy races, Panduids[1] and Kuruids,[2] shone, reseated in their chariots of light, surrounded by the glory of Krishna!"

The Pāndavas and Draupadī resumed the divine forms that had belonged to them before their life upon the earth, and that Krishna and they had laid aside in order to bring about the triumph, here below, of those virtues whose types are in heaven, over the vices personified in Duryōdhana and his abettors

The Mahābhārata was sung for the first time at the Sacrifice of Serpents, celebrated by king Janamejaya, great-grandson of Arjuna. Why had the sovereign of Hastināpura ordained that solemnity? That was the subject of one of those legends with which the great epic poem opens, and on which the Brāhmanical influence impresses a strange, mysterious character.

The Nāgas, or Serpents, a people whom Troyer believes to be a branch of the Lunar Dynasty, had been cursed by their mother, Kadrū, one of the wives of the sage, Kasyapa. "Against all maledictions there ever exist remedies," said Vāsuki, king of the Nāgas, "but for those who are cursed by a mother, I do not know from whom or where deliverance can come, for this malediction surpasses in force one hurled by the God eternal and boundless, whose words never deceive."[3] Whilst Vāsuki was thus speaking, the punishment was already descending on him and on his family. The king Janamejaya, in avenging the death of his father Parikshit, whom the venomous tooth of a Nāga had torn from the love of his family and his people, had ordained that the entire race of his father's murderer should perish in the flames.[4] But

[1] Pāndavas

[2] Kauravas.

[3] *Fragments of the Mahābhārata*, translated by Th. Pavie.

[4] See in the curious and learned notes of the interesting history of the kings of Kashmir the explanation given by M Troyer, of this sacrifice, considered by him to be purely allegorical. (*Rājataranginī, History of the kings of Kashmir*, translated and commented on by M. Troyer, and published at the expense of the Asiatic Society, Paris, 1840.)

Brahma had promised the cursed ones a saviour, who should be born of Vāsuki's sister, Jaratkāru, and of a Brāhman, of the same name as herself, a Rishi sanctified by penitence. This recluse had renounced marriage. Convinced and overwhelmed by the reproaches and prayers addressed to him by the shades of his ancestors, who were deprived of the Srāddhas or funeral sacrifices, he consented to search for a partner who could give them a Putra. Then this worn and emaciated old man, who appeared to have nothing human about him, and whose soul seemed on the point of leaving a body that was almost in the grasp of death, this old man, after having vainly traversed the world in the hope of meeting with a wife, stopped in the midst of a forest, and, in a loud slow voice, three times addressed to the world this last summons :—

" I desire a wife ! May all beings moving and motionless, visible and invisible, in this world, whoever they are, listen to me, to me, who, vowed to rigid austerities, act according to the ardent desire of my ancestors, who in their agony, and with the object of having posterity, cry to me · 'Do thou marry !' And in order to marry I shall choose from all over the earth, the woman, who shall be given to me as in alms , poor and sad, obeying the voice of my ancestors, to all beings that have a daughter, I make my declaration , let them give her to me, who wander over all the earth , let a young girl of the same name as myself, be offered like alms to me ; but I will not maintain her , let such a young wife be bestowed on me ! "

To this singular request, the voice of the king of Nāgas responded ; understanding that the salvation of his race was at hand, he united his sister to the anchorite.

After this marriage, the Rishi warned his young wife that he would leave her on the first occasion that she crossed his wishes. The new wife, understanding that on her depended the destiny of her race, endeavoured by her continual gentleness and patience to retain her husband's favour.

The Brāhman had fallen into a deep sleep, during which the stars interrupted their courses Nevertheless, behind the mountain of the West, the sun sent down his last rays in gold and purple floods. Night would surprise the Brāhman before he could perform his ablutions and attend to the sacred fire. The young woman was distressed at the cruel alternative : " Shall I do well," said she to herself, " to wake my husband,

or shall I do wrong? His nature is a difficult one to deal with; but he holds fast to the performance of his duties; ought I not to awake him, that he may perform his ablutions? On the one hand, I see the anger of the Rishi, strict in the performance of the duties of his caste; and on the other, the infraction of those same duties."

It was done! Through respect for the law, she is ready to sacrifice herself, to sacrifice her own people; and she murmurs in a timid voice: "Rise, O fortunate Brāhman! The sun is nearly sinking; fulfil thy evening obligations, O happy one, by touching the waters, thou who faithfully fulfillest thy observances; this is the agreeable, the terrible moment when the sacred fire must burn, which is never extinguished; this is the evening hour, the sun is in the West, O master!" The Brāhman awakes and to the soft accents of his wife he answers with severe expressions of reproach and anger: "Thou speakest to me words of scorn, daughter of a serpent. I will no longer live near thee; I shall go as I came; so long as I sleep, the sun cannot, O beautiful one, sink below the horizon at its usual hour; such is my thought No man can find pleasure in living where he is despised, and especially a man who is strict in the performance of his duties, a Brāhman of my sort."

Never had the irascibility of the man and the pride of the Brāhman, the first-born of creation, found mingled expression in haughtier language.

With clasped hands, and eyes bathed in tears, the princess of the Nāgas, implored her husband, in words choked by sobs, to have pity upon her, who, always pure, had remained faithful to her duty: upon her, who, always loving and devoted, had surrounded him with assiduous attentions; upon her, in whom reposed the hopes of an entire race . . . The Brāhman left his wife, after announcing to her, that the birth of the saviour of the accursed race would soon take place. The king of the Nāgas wiped away the tears of the forsaken wife; and, by his tenderness and veneration, the proofs of which he showered upon her, he consoled the young sister whom he had been obliged to sacrifice for the good of his people.

Some years passed. Āstīka, the predestined child, had, from his tenderest years, acquired profound knowledge, when Janamejaya ordered the great sacrifice. Already the flames on the pyre had commenced their work of destruction, when a child

presented himself: it was Āstīka. He had cured Vāsuki of the burning fever that was making him fear the near approach of death; he had inoculated himself with the disease, and at his mother's prayer, he came to fulfil his mission of succour. He astonished and charmed the sovereign by his precocious wisdom and eloquence. How could Janamejaya show him his royal admiration? Let the Brāhman child utter a wish, and the monarch would grant it.

At that moment, Takshaka, one of the kings of the Nāgas, and the very murderer of Parikshit, had by Brāhmanical evocations, been torn from, Swarga, his refuge, and dragged down to the earth, his tomb. Only to the abandonment of his suppliant and to a shameful flight, had Indra himself owed his escape from the danger of sharing the fate of him whom he had defended.

Takshaka, yielding with terror to the irresistible power of the magic sacrifice, was about to fall upon the altar of fire . . . "Now is the moment," said Āstīka to himself; and he addressed the son of Parikshit as follows: "If thou wilt grant me a favour, O Janamejaya, this is what I should choose: let thy sacrifice cease, and let not the serpent race be exterminated.'

But the king, irritated at the obstacle that hindered the gratification of his filial vengeance, exclaimed: "Gold, silver, cows, anything else that thou desirest, I will grant, O Brāhman; only let not my sacrifice be stopped!"

And the child emphatically replied: "Gold, silver, cows, O king! these are not what I ask for; but let thy sacrifice cease, and let my mother's family be saved!"

Thus spoke the Brāhman, and the king was obliged to yield.

In this race, lost by a woman, redeemed by a woman, in this saviour charging himself with his brother's and mother's sufferings, imparting new life to the cursed ones, who were eagerly awaiting him, cannot we find here the mythical expression of a remembrance belonging to the world's original state; namely the earthly Paradise? [1]

To the legend of the Serpents belongs an episode which

[1] M Renan himself admits the existence of a common cradle of the human races: "Everything points towards placing the Eden of the Shemites at the watershed of the rivers of Asia, at this navel of the world, to which all races appear to point the finger as the meeting-point of their most ancient remembrances." (*On the origin of language.*)

bears the impression of that strength, of that delicacy of feeling, in the expression of which Hindus excel. The sacrifice of oneself to conjugal love is again the last word of the touching adventure, no longer the sacrifice of the wife, but of the husband, the betrothed. Though far removed, the recital calls to mind the mythic basis of a poesy really dramatic, attached by Greece to the legendary history of the mysterious reformer of her creed, of the most ancient of her minstrels. It was the allegory of Orpheus and Eurydice, with which Virgil has twice enriched the Latin muse. From his youth, the sweet poet of Mantua had preluded, in the touching accents of his *Culex*, his song of the *Georgics*, which, developing, with masterly fulness, the main idea of the first work, has remained one of the most magnificent vibrations of the Roman lyre

Like Sakuntalā, her sister, a child forsaken by her mother, the Apsara Menakā, had been sheltered by an anchorite. It was not in a nest of verdure protected by the Sakuntas that Sthūlakesa had found the little forsaken one, but on the banks of a river. The austere anchorite, with that tender kindness, the secret of which is only possessed by souls of strong character, became for the little creature at once father and mother.

"And as she was beautiful even amongst the most beautiful of women, gifted with inward and outward graces, the great hermit named her Pramadvarā (the best amongst beautiful women)[1]

Ruru, son of the anchorite, Pramati, had seen, in the hermitage, the adopted daughter of Sthūlakesa; the virtues of the two young people brought about an attachment between them; and the young Brāhman made known to his father, through his friends, his desire to unite his own existence with the virgin whom he loved "And Pramati asked for her, as bride for his son, from the celebrated Sthūlakesa; who, standing in the place of father to the young Pramadvarā, gave her to Ruru. The marriage day was fixed for the first asterism of the mansion of the moon, the divinity which presides over marriage."

A few days intervened before the wishes of the betrothed received a holy consecration. Pramadvarā, yet a child enjoying the last hours of her maiden liberty, shared the amusements

[1] *Fragments of the Mahābhārata*, translated by Th. Pavie.

of her companions. She ran through the forest, skimming over the verdure with light feet; but the green carpet concealed the most dangerous enemy of mankind. A serpent, touched by the young girl's foot, raised itself and bit her, and Pramadvarā fell down, dead. The poet, in accents of melancholy sweetness, describes the young girl, a moment ago palpitating with life and happiness, and now frozen and motionless for ever in death; and in her virgin beauty, more touching than ever.

The anchorites themselves, these priests, prepared to look without surprise upon any sacrifice, these philosophers accustomed to contemplate, with an indifferent eye, life and death, yet deplored the loss of so much grace united to so much virtue.

But he who was to have been Pramadvarā's husband, could not endure the bitterness of the sight. He retired into a solitude, where, sheltered from the eye of man, and alone with the Divinity, he gave himself up to outbursts of mad grief; and there, in the name of all that was pure and good in his soul, in the name of all the good that he had done in his lifetime, he implored the gods to grant the resurrection of his betrothed Scarcely had he breathed that prayer, than a celestial messenger descended, and said sadly to the young man: "The words which thou didst pronounce in thy pain, O Ruru! are useless; for life no longer survives, O virtuous Brāhman, in the dead whose days have passed away; and the allotted sum of days is ended for this poor daughter of the Gandharva and Apsara."

Nevertheless, he confessed that some means had lately been decreed by the gods to recall, from the dark domains of Yama, the soul that had been snatched away from the body. What are the means? Such was the cry of the betrothed. He would fain use those means!

"Give the half of thy life to this young woman, O son of Bhrigu," then said the celestial messenger, "and by that means, Pramadvarā, thy spouse will rise again to life, O Ruru!"

"I do give the half of my life to the young girl, O thou, the best of those who fly in the air!" said the betrothed with ecstacy. "May she rise again in all her love and beauty, my well-beloved."

Pramadvarā awaking out of a sleep, that had been destined to endure for ever, was reunited to her saviour, to him who said of her later on, that her life only made one with his own. But the young Brāhman, not able to forget the mortal sufferings of his beautiful wife, nor the sharper anguish they had caused him, killed with savage anger all the serpents that he met in his secluded retreat.

When Yudhisthira, having lost his kingdom through gambling, was living with his brothers and Draupadī in the forest of Kāmyaka, the anchorites, his neighbours there, comforted and strengthened him by reminding him that others before him had fought against adversity, and that the trials through which they had passed had been for them the path of happiness and glory.

The Brāhman Vrihadasva then related to him the adventures of king Nala. Nala was king of the Nishadhas[1] Wonderfully gifted by nature, he appeared to be the Indra of this world. Never had a bolder rider guided the fiery ardour of a steed. Never had a handsomer mortal charmed the hearts of women.

But the young prince was not only distinguished by outward agreeableness. Profoundly versed in the holy scriptures, he honoured those Brāhmans who were the depositaries of it, but he did better than that, for he practised its precepts, and truth was the queen of his conscience.

A fault, however, must be added to all those great and brilliant qualities; Nala loved gambling.

Bhīma was at that time reigning in the country of the Vidarbhas. He was a pious and just prince, like Nala. He had one daughter named Damayantī, who was so beautiful that the gods, when they saw her, forgot the charms of the immortal goddesses.

Damayantī had often heard Nala's praises spoken of by those around her; and likewise, at the court of Nishadha, the name of Damayantī was associated with grace and virtue alone. Without having ever met, the children of the two kings yet loved each other.

Nala, anxious, troubled, had fled from his palace, and taken refuge in the park, that extended to the doors of the gynæceum.

[1] *Country situated in the S.E. of India* (note by translator, M. Emile Burnouf).

The swans were disporting themselves upon the green grass, and Nala drew one towards him.

" Do not kill me, O king," said the swan to him, " I will do a thing which will please thee ; I will recall thee to the memory of Damayantī so that she shall think of no one but thee." [1]

Surrounded by her friends, Damayantī was passing along the walks in the royal park, when the white flock of the messengers of Nala alighted on the ground before her. The virgin band dispersed. Each one endeavoured to catch one of those marvellous swans, with its plumage of snowy white, its golden ornaments ; and the swiftness of the young girls rivalled that of the birds.

But the swan that Damayantī pursued pronounced Nala's name, investing it with that aureole of divine grace with which, in Damayantī's presence, people had already for some time been accustomed to crown the young prince. How much ought that marriage to be desired, which should unite in one couple all that was noble and charming in this world !

" Thou art a pearl amongst women, and Nala is the handsomest among men ; a woman so choice, and a man so choice, must result in an excellent union."

And the young maiden, in her agitation, allowed her happiness to be seen in the words, " Well, tell Nala, ' Let it be so.' "

And the messengers of Nala were again lost to sight in the clouds. The swans had, however, carried away on their wings Damayantī's gaiety and happy thoughtlessness. She became sad, and often wept ; and Bhīma informed by the princess's companions of the grief that was wearing her away, ordered a Swayamvara, which should bring all the suitors for the princess's hand to the court of Vidarbha. The gods themselves assisted at the fête. As they travelled through the air, the Immortals saw king Nala marching upon the earth beneath them. Immediately descending to him, they commanded him to announce to Damayantī that the guardians of the world had left their celestial habitations as suitors in the contest for her hand. Indra, Agni, Varuna, even the gloomy Yama—between such was the choice of Vidarbha's princess to lie.

And Nala, who at first had refused to lend himself to the service of rivals, even though they were divine, sacrificed his

[1] *Nala*, episode of the Mahâbhârata, translated from the Sanskrit into French by Emile Burnouf, Nancy, 1856.

love to his piety. Made invisible by the power of the Immortals, he penetrated, unseen, into Damayantī's apartment. The moment was at last come when Nala should see the realization of the ideal being, whose portrait he had so long been treasuring in his soul. But under what circumstances, alas ?

Damayantī was before him . . . " When he saw her and her sweet smile, his love grew still greater." The companions of the princess had arisen, in a transport of admiration In their hearts they were feeling what with their lips they dared not utter.

" O what beauty ! what splendour ! what firmness possesses this great soul ! Who is he ? a god ? a Yaksha ? or a Gandharva ? "

Nala hid the agitation of his heart, under cover of a smile Never had Damayantī seen the young king, and yet she had recognized him . . . She questioned him. How had he been able without hindrance to penetrate into the gynæceum, into which strangers were under strict orders forbidden to enter ?

It was a moment when the young girl was allowing the secret of her virgin soul to escape her Nala, with an heroic effort, begged of her to transfer her chaste predilection to another. " In preference to the guardians of the world, how canst thou choose a mortal for husband ? " And the king, pretending to dread for himself the anger of the gods, implored Damayantī to save him by accepting immortality for herself The young girl wept. No, she would not choose her husband from amongst the Immortals ! They should have her worship, but Nala her love ! All the gods and kings might join in a Swayamvara, but Nala would be her choice.

And the king of the Nishadhas carried back Damayantī's answer to the guardians of the world.

The day for the Swayamvara had arrived.

" Through a doorway decorated with columns of gold, the kings entered on the brilliant scene, like mighty lions gaining the mountain top." Garlands of flowers crowned their beautiful locks Precious stones sparkled from their ear-pendants. They took their seats on the thrones that were set apart for them. Damayantī made her entrance within the enclosure, and all eyes were fixed upon her in admiration. Her gaze only sought Nala's . . . Suddenly she became agitated . . . Five men, all resembling him, appeared before her ; they were the gods

who had taken the form of their rival. How could her heart be able to discern her beloved? Then, joining her trembling hands, with a sublime inspiration she earnestly prayed to the very same gods who were causing the illusion. In the name of Truth, in the name of her own innocence, she implored them to enable her to recognize the husband whom she had chosen under their paternal guidance, the one whom she loved and whom she had vowed to honour for ever.

Touched with gentle pity and tender admiration for the young girl, whose candour appealed to their justice against their love, the gods rose from their seats into the air. The dust of the road had neither soiled their garments nor withered their garlands; the heat had not moistened their foreheads, and their eyes were as motionless as those of their statues.

"Doubled by his shadow (the gods, on the other hand, cast no shadow), his garland faded, covered with sweat and dust, Nala, too, stood up, but his feet touched the ground, and his eyelids moved"

Damayantī gazed in turn at the gods and at Nala. She blushingly approached the latter, overwhelmed with fatigue as he was, seized the border of his soiled garment, and threw a fresh garland over his shoulders . . . Thus did she choose her husband.[1]

While the gods were admiring this maidenly confession of love, this silent and sublime promise of devotion, Nala, transported with joy, was comforting the young woman, who, from henceforth, has promised not only to share his joys, but his griefs also.

[1] We cannot resist the pleasure of quoting here the beautiful and touching commentary given by M Legouvé, in his *Histoire morale des femmes*, on this episode "Everything is beautifully exquisite in this legend, and the teaching exceeds the beauty This father who gathers round his daughter all those whom she might choose, this cloak under which Damayantī hides herself as if to say to Nala. 'I will live sheltered by thee', this fresh crown placed by her on his head, a charming image of consolation, brought by the spouse to her husband, this silent acceptance of suffering borne in common and of paths full of dust; all these delicate traits repeat under a thousand forms the one word which includes all love! They all repeat. 'The betrothed must say to her husband · I love this world better with thee than heaven with the gods' What does it matter to the young Indian wife, the eternal purity of the celestial inhabitants, and their unalterable beauty! What attracts her, this a human creature, is the face bathed in sweat, *the body which casts a shadow*! For, there alone, is something for her to nurse, console, and love!"

"Yes, since thou givest homage to a mortal in the presence of the gods," said he to her, "I am thy husband and I accept thy word. As long as there is breath in my body, maiden of the sweet smile, I will be with thee; it is the truth that I am speaking."

Would he always remember that oath?

The betrothed gazed upon Agni, the protector of the domestic hearth, and prayed to him in silence. The gods reascended to heaven after showering gifts upon their happy rival.—The waters of a limpid stream would flow before him at his will. At sight of him would blossom sweet-scented garlands. Food on passing through his hands would have a sweeter flavour. No obstacle would oppose him on his course. Constant would be his virtue. He would understand the august meaning of sacrifice. To him would belong the power of self-existence! To him would belong those worlds that shine of themselves!

And two children would perpetuate Nala's life on earth.

Kali, the fourth age of the world, the age of fraud, jealous of the happiness of the young couple, had vowed to destroy it, with the aid of Dvāpara, his predecessor. For twelve years he sought in vain for an opportunity to ruin Damayantī's husband. He gained at last the ear of a brother of Nala's, Pushkara The latter was to engage the king in a game of dice, and his kingdom should be the stake. Pushkara would win, for Kali would be behind him

Nala, in his infatuation, staked furiously all that he possessed, and forgot his wife, his children, his kingdom.

The people besieged the doors of the palace They wanted to save their king, and to deliver him from the fatal influence to which he was being subjected. Nala's charioteer, the faithful Vārshṇēya, entered the queen's presence: "All the town, O queen," said he, "is at the door, ready to succour you, let it be told to the king of the Nishadhas that all his subjects are there, and that they cannot endure the misfortune of their king, who knows justice."

Damayantī repaired to her husband. He was still playing, he would not hear her supplications, nor see her tears "He is no longer himself," said the people, retiring in confusion, for this game of dice had already lasted several days. Then the queen sent for her nurse. In those ancient times, the woman who made her nurse-child imbibe, with her milk, her own

instincts, was not, according to Ascoli,[1] a mercenary person, who was dismissed when the child no longer required her care; but, on the contrary, she was a mother, of whom was expected not only a healthy body, but also a sound moral character, and one who would never abandon the child whom she had nourished from her own bosom.

Damayantī said to her faithful friend, whom nature had gifted with persuasive eloquence: "Go, Vrihatsenā, gather the councillors by order of Nala, tell them of all he has lost and of what still remains to him."

The councillors came. Damayantī herself announced to the king the arrival of the deputation He preserved the same indifference, and still went on playing; and the queen retired, the hot blood mantling her brow.

Her maternal love inspired her with a brave resolution. She sent for the charioteer Vārshṇēya, of whose devotion to his master she was aware, and prayed him to do the unhappy king a service, which might perhaps be the last . . .

Nala was blinded by a delirium that relieved him of all responsibility Her husband could not be guilty! Vārshṇēya must listen to the queen and obey her, for she felt that her strength was exhausted, and at times she thought she would lose her reason

[1] *Study orientali e linguistici*, a work already quoted. "The foster-mother, the woman who fulfils the functions of a mother, is not usually regarded in antiquity as a vile mercenary, dismissed as soon as her work is over. She profits by the reciprocal affection existing between the nurseling and the nurse, and this affection, once begotten, develops into a faithful companionship, which lasts beyond the nurseling's adolescence, and even after her motherhood Such a custom must naturally suggest, in choosing a foster-mother, certain precautions, which even to-day, seem to be recommended almost in vain by moralists

"We shall see in the hymn xiii (sloka 49) the mother of the king of Chedi having near her the faithful foster-mother and similarly in the Bible (Gen xxiv, 59) we see Rebecca going to her husband with her nurse, and the holy narrator (ibid., xxxv, 8), in describing her death and her name, tells us that the tree under which her remains were placed was called by the family *the oak of tears*

"M Ascoli also quotes the nurse of Ulysses, whose name Euryclea (of wide fame) has the same significance as that of Vrihatsenā, the nurse of Damayantī. Let us also add here the nurse of Aeneas, that Caieta of whom Virgil sings (Eneid, book vii) The town where her ashes were laid is still called by her name, for the ancient Caieta is now Gaèta" (Note —This translation is made from the French version of the original Italian.)

The storm was brewing. Before the thunderbolt fell, Vārshṇēya must place the two children, who had blessed this royal marriage, in shelter from the storm; he must take them to the father of Damayantī. And, foreseeing that on his return from the mission, the faithful servant would no longer find his former master and mistress there, she commanded him not to return!

Meanwhile the game still went on. Like Yudhisthira, Nala had lost his kingdom, but when Pushkara proposed that he should stake the last and dearest of his treasures, Damayantī herself, the king rose up, overwhelmed with shame and grief. He saw now to what a depth of abasement he had fallen, and, looking at his brother, he divested himself of his royal garments, and departed. Such had not been the scruple of Yudhisthira, the king of justice, to whom the Brāhmans were narrating the dramatic story of the sovereign of the Nishadhas.

Nala leaves the palace; Damayantī follows him.

Homeless and without food, the husband and wife wandered through the country Nala, seeing some birds with golden wings, eagerly caught them, for they would serve as food. He covered them with his cloak, the last garment that remained to him. The birds flew off, carrying away on their sparkling wings the tunic of the king Nala, and screaming to the exile · "We are the dice, O foolish one, we wanted thy garment, it is for that we came, for it was not willingly we saw thee depart with even a single garment on"

They were the emissaries of Kali, that personification of the evil age. Yes, they were truly the vices of his time, which, by their seductive allurements, "their golden wings," had ruined the king of the Nishadhas, such is no doubt the point of this striking allegory Nala, with singular persistence, pointed continually to Damayantī the road to Vidarbha The latter, understanding his meaning, prayed him, sobbing, not to separate her from him What would become of him without his friend, his refuge, his consolation? "If thou art fatigued or hungry in this frightful desert, thou wilt think of our happiness and I will refresh thee"

Nala, defending himself from any thought of wishing to leave her, assured her that, in abandoning her, he would abandon himself. But Damayantī was not reassured, for Nala still pointed to the road that led to her paternal home. Why should

they not both go and take refuge under the sheltering wing of Bhīma? That was Damayantī's desire; but Nala refused; for his wife's father had seen him in days when he had been a happy and prosperous king.

The pious wife covered her husband with part of her own garment; and thus they continued their way through the desolate forest . . . On discovering a hut, they entered it, and lay down to sleep upon the ground. For a long time, Nala could not sleep, and gazed, instead, at Damayantī, reposing in the calm of her innocence and resignation.

"This devoted wife suffers because of me," said he to himself, "without me, she could one day return to her family. With me, she will certainly undergo sufferings; left alone, perhaps . . she might possibly find some relief here." Should he abandon her in this wild forest or no? Was she not placed under the safeguard of her own dignity? Then, cutting into half the garment that covered them both, he rushed away in the madness of his grief He retraced his steps, and looked once more upon the frail young wife whom he was exposing to every peril . . and wept.

"May the Ādityas, the Vasus,[1] the Rudras,[2] the two Aswins, and the band of the Maruts guard thee!" cried he at last, "Oh, blessed one, thy virtue protects thee."

He rushed off again, and again returned A third time he went away He could not make up his mind to sacrifice the last consolation that was left to him His evil genius drew him away; but his love brought him back to the beautiful, innocent creature whose life was bound up in his own .

Kali conquered at last, and Nala, sobbing violently, left behind him all his happiness

Damayantī awoke . She found herself alone, forsaken by her protector in a place where no human voice answered hers, where danger was continually near. Frightened and beside herself, she screamed: "Great king!" . No answer . . "Ah, my defender! Ah, great king! Ah, my master! why hast thou left me? I am lost, I am dead, I am terrified to death in this forest"

She listened breathlessly . Still the same silence. "No, it may be only a jest; yet I feel afraid, show thyself

[1] Name of eight demi-gods

[2] The Rudras are eleven. Rudra is lord of the winds, the air personified.

to my eyes. I see thee, I see thee, O, I see thee well, Nishadha! Thou hast hidden thyself amidst the bushes; why dost thou not answer? O naughty one! I have followed thee here; I am tormented and thou comest not to console me. I do not complain for myself . . . but thou, in what state art thou, all alone? It is for thee I feel pity. How, O king, when overwhelmed with thirst, hunger, and fatigue, lying at night at the foot of a tree, how wilt thou feel, when thou seest me not? . . ."

She ran, then stopped, and sank down to the ground with fear! She rose again, called out, and finally cursed the evil genius that had persuaded Nala that he had not yet drunk his cup of misfortune to the dregs. A serpent glided towards her . . she will die. She wept not for herself, but for the husband who would see her no more Who would cherish him and care for him?

A hunter delivered her; but she had only escaped one danger to encounter one yet more horrible. The stranger, as he gazed upon her, thought her beautiful, and she understood him. A queen, yet she had no longer her guards, a wife, yet she had no longer a husband; but as a wife, her virtue yet was with her, and in the name of wifely duty she cursed him who had insulted her by his looks Smitten, as if by thunder, the hunter fell at her feet, for her words had killed him . .

. . . . .

She continued her way in a forest haunted by robbers, and by the Mlecchas, those aboriginal Indians, whom the Aryan invasion had driven further into the country She heard the piercing note of the cricket, the hiss of the serpent, the roar of the wild beast. The nyagrodha,[1] the aswattha,[2] extended over her their enormous leafy foliage. The fan-palm rose aloft, crowned with its tuft of foliage There blossomed from amongst this screen of sombre verdure the scarlet flowers of the kinsuka,[3] the golden berries of the date tree,[4] the reddish-white clusters of the amra,[5] the panicles of the arishta, with its tender tints and sweet perfumes like those of the lilac, the jambu,[6] with its long stamens and pale yellow corollas, the

[1] *Ficus indica*
[2] *Ficus religiosa.*
[3] *Butea frondosa.*
[4] *Mangifera indica.*
[5] *Melia azedarach*
[6] *Jambosa Eugenia*

âmalaka,[1] its lip of carmine violet spotted with purple. Under the footsteps of Damayantī the dhavas [2] bent their bright red spikes towards the ground, but neither the shadow of the trees hid Nala, nor had the flowering grass been trodden under-foot.

The high summits of the mountains could be descried as far as the eye could reach, and from their sides flowed stately waterfalls in torrents of foam. Rivers and lakes displayed their transparent waters, where floated the Indian lotus, with its velvety leaves and pinky petals; but neither did the echoes of the grottos repeat the voice of Nala, nor the waves testify by their tremor that a man had passed over them.

"O sinless hero," said Damayantī, "am I not thy well-beloved?" With hungry eyes and yawning jaws a tiger sprang towards the young queen. She cried out to Nala for help: "It is thy wife," she cried, "thy wife, alone in the great forest, it is I, it is Damayantī who calls thee; why answerest thou not?"

She questioned all nature about her husband, from the now retreating king of the wilderness which had just threatened her life, to the king of mountains in whose sides Nala might be concealed. She talked with the mountain and the tree; for the Indians, by their belief in a universal spirit, thought that it inhabited stone and tree alike.

Ah, when should she hear the well-beloved voice of Nala, saying as it used to do: "Damayantī!"

Suddenly she came to a hermitage, inhabited by holy Munis. They received the beautiful weeping queen with respectful attention. They listened to her story, and promised happiness in the future. At last she had met human beings. But was it not only a mirage . . . or a dream? . . It all disappeared, and Damayantī, pale and in despair, found herself alone once more.

She now entered a still wilder looking forest. In the far distance, however, she perceived chariots, horses, elephants; it was a caravan; and Damayantī advanced in its direction.

When the travellers saw, coming towards them, this woman covered with rags, stained with dust, her eyes reddened with crying, some, frightened, ran off; others mocked her; others

[1] *Justicia adhatoda*
[2] *Lythrum fruticosum*.

looked at her in motionless astonishment. Some sympathizing voices, however, murmured in the ear of the forsaken one: "Who art thou, poor woman? Who is thy father? What seekest thou in this forest? We have been touched at thy sight. Art thou really a woman? Tell us the truth; art thou not a divinity of the forest, or of the mountain, or of the country? Protect us. If thou art a Yakshī, a Rākshasī, or may be, a being from heaven, grant us salvation and defend us. O thou, who art so beautiful, grant that this caravan may happily depart hence, and that fortune may attend us!" And she answered them· "I am a woman, believe me; I am the daughter of a king, daughter-in-law of a king, wife of a king; I want to see my husband again"

The caravan was journeying towards the country of Chedi Damayantī followed it. They halted on the shore of a great lake, with sweet-scented lotus floating on it, and surrounded by a delightful wood, enlivened with the song of birds But in the middle of the night a troop of wild elephants rushed upon the tame elephants of the caravan and crushed chariots, horses, and men. Those who escaped from the havoc, cursed Damayantī, to whose ill-omened presence they attributed the disaster, and the poor woman, on hearing their threats of death, took to flight in terror She, innocent creature, also thought herself to be the cause of the misfortune; fate pursued her even in the persons of those who interested themselves in her! And yet her conscience reproached her for no fault. No doubt she must have been deeply guilty in a former existence, to be so severely punished in her present one!

Perhaps also the gods had remembered her Swayamvara .

Why had the elephant's foot spared her? Separated from her husband and her children, what would become of her in the forest? Some holy Brāhmans, who had escaped from the havoc wrought in the caravan, received their young companion, and in the evening she arrived at the capital of the kingdom of Chedi. At the sight of her distracted features, her long, dishevelled hair, and her disordered garments, people thought her mad, and the children ran after her in the streets.

The king's mother seeing her from the palace terrace, commanded that she should be brought to her. Struck by her beauty, which still shone through all the change in her features, and all the dirt that stained them the queen gently questioned

her. Damayantī told her that she had been a workwoman in a good family; her husband was fond of gambling, and had lost his fortune by it; she had followed him into the forest, where he had forsaken her; and that. ever since. she had been seeking him

And she wept. The queen, touched by her story, offered her shelter, which the young woman accepted on condition that she should not be treated as a servant, and that she should have to speak to no man, except to Brāhmans; for from these latter she might be able to learn of her husband's fate. The queen promised all, and introduced her to her daughter Sunandā, to be a companion, being of her own age; and the young girl joyously took Damayantī to her own room.

Meanwhile, bitten by a king of the serpents, whom he had rescued from a most dangerous situation, Nala had become ugly and deformed. It was in Nala's own interest, and in order that he might not be recognized, that the Nāga had disfigured the man who had saved him. It was also to punish Kali, who had been condemned, through Damayantī's malediction, to live for a certain time as a prisoner in Nala's body, that he had inoculated him with a certain poison from whose effect the evil genius alone would suffer.

The king of the serpents directed Nala, under the name of Bāhuka, to repair to the town of Ayodhyā, where a prince reigned, skilled in the art of playing dice, Nala would be taught this art, and in return he was to communicate to the prince his wonderful skill in the art of horsemanship. When Nala wished, he could resume his own form, on thinking of the sovereign of the Nāgas and on putting on the celestial garments that the latter gave him Nala arrived at the court of Ayodhyā, whither Vārshneya, formerly the charioteer of the king of the Nishadhas, had retired, after having in obedience to Damayantī's command, remitted to Bhīma the precious charge that she had confided to him But Nala did not discover himself to him.

At the court of Ayodhyā, Nala thought continually of Damayantī. He bitterly reproached himself for having abandoned her; every evening, with sad lamentations he asked himself where, at that hour, was the tender and devoted companion who had suffered so much for him Bhīma sent forth scouts to search for both his daughter and his son-in-law. One of these, the Brāhman, Sudeva, discovered his king's

daughter at the Chedi court. Through all the ravages made by grief upon her features, he had recognized her; and the sight of the unhappy princess had inspired him with reflections similar to those of Hanumān, when, from the summit of the sinsapa, he saw Sītā in the grove of asokas.

Sudeva had an interview with the princess of Vidarbha, and the king's sister reported to her mother the emotion evinced by the workwoman during the conversation, while it was still going on. The queen mother heard them, and, advancing, went to Damayantī and the Brāhman, and adjured the latter to reveal to her the truth about the beautiful, noble creature. When she had learnt it, a touching scene followed. The poor forsaken one had found in the queen a mother's sister, and she began to feel anew the warmth of life round this hearth of the family affections, from which she had been too long separated. This second mother said to her " Thy father has a house, my child, but I also have one; and my domain, Damayantī, is also thine."

But Damayantī thanked her tenderly, and then took leave of her. Down in Vidarbha, a son and a daughter were waiting for her. They, poor children, were deprived of a mother's love, and, perhaps for ever, of a father's protection She desired to press them once more to her bosom.

With joy did the king and queen of Vidarbha behold the return of their daughter, guarded by a fine escort—of the beloved one, who once had lived happily under their protection, and who, since, had cruelly suffered from misery and abandonment. But, the very next day, after her arrival, Damayantī implored her mother to give her Nala back to her or to let her die. The queen wept. She despaired of seeing her daughter's desire ever realized. Yet, at her prayer, Bhīma sent Brāhmans in all directions in search of Nala. Before starting, they came to receive Damayantī's commands: "In all the kingdoms through which you pass," said she to them, "go to all assemblages of men, and repeat these words, 'Where, gamester, hast thou gone, after having cut in two my garment and forsaken me,—me, who am devoted to thee,—and left me sleeping alone in the forest?—A well-beloved husband leaving his well-beloved wife! As a mourning woman should, she sits on the ground, her eyes turned towards thee, her form still covered with half the garment; ever does she weep from pain; O king, be propitious and answer her.' Say these words

and more, that he may have pity upon me: 'The fire fanned by wind consumes the forest; and the husband must always sustain and protect his wife. Why then failest thou to protect both—both forest and wife, thou who understandest justice? Men called thee good, noble, generous; but thou hast lost all pity, doubtless because I am no longer happy in pleasing thee. Grant me grace, O prince of men, for thou hast told me that goodness is the first duty.' If, when you say these words, someone answers you, you will know it is Nala . . ."

When after many days the Brāhman, Parnāda, returned to Ayodhyā, he related to Damayantī a strange incident that had happened. No one at the court of Rituparna had appeared to be moved at the touching message of the princess, but Bāhuka, the king's charioteer, who had afterwards come secretly to speak to him. He was deformed, but marvellously skilled in driving the chariot, and in preparing dishes of the most delicious flavour He wept much and said to the Brāhman: "Even, when fallen into great misery, good and noble women can guard themselves, and be sure of gaining heaven; even when forsaken by their husbands, they never become embittered, but they make a shield of their virtue, these noble women . . The poor fool is unfortunate, joy is lost to him; but let her not be incensed against him, because he has forsaken her. He seeks for means to live. Birds have robbed him of his raiment. Anxieties consume him; but let her not be incensed against him, whether she has been well or ill-treated, when she sees her husband fallen from his high estate, deprived of his kingdom, deprived of joy, starving, plunged in misfortune."

The queen also wept, for she felt that the deformed Bāhuka was Nala. She consulted with her mother, and it was decided that, unknown to Bhīma, the Brāhman should return to Ayodhyā, and announce that Bhīma was preparing to celebrate the second Swayamvara of his daughter, Damayantī. Rituparna journeyed to Damayantī's Swayambara, and Bāhuka was the driver of his chariot.

Nala was divided between fear and hope. Had Damayantī really forgotten her former vows? Oh no, for she was a mother! . . . But then, what meant the announcement of that Swayamvara? Soon would he know everything. It was during the journey that Rituparna had taught him the

art of playing dice, and that Kali, his evil genius, had left him. When she heard the sound of the coming chariots, while yet in the far distance, Damayantī thought that she recognized Nala's driving. If she should not see the one whom she expected that day, she would die.

There was no Swayamvara. Astonished at a visit, the motive of which Rituparna judged it useless to explain, Bhīma nevertheless gave his visitor a noble and affectionate welcome.

From the palace terrace, Damayantī observed everything. Penelope had not recognized Ulysses under the rags that covered him. But Damayantī had recognized Nala under the repulsive form of Bāhuka The reason was, that the Indians alone of all ancient nations, honoured the purity and tenderness of conjugal love, and that with them, the heart had a language whose accents could not be heard in the less pure and less vivid sentiments that formed part of the Grecian marriages.

Damayantī sent her maid, the beautiful Kesini, to the charioteer, Bāhuka She was to repeat to him the same words that the Brāhman Parnāda had pronounced at the court of Ayodhyā, in the name of the forsaken wife. While her messenger was speaking to Bāhuka, the interview was witnessed by Damayantī from the terrace above. She saw the charioteer, his eyes filled with tears, make a supreme effort to preserve his composure; but when his turn came to repeat to Kesini his reply to the Brāhman, sobs choked his utterance Damayantī had him watched. She recognized in his wonderful feats the gifts given at her Swayamvara by the gods to her betrothed.

She made one last trial It was by a detail borrowed from the nuptial chamber that Penelope had tested Ulysses; and it was by means of her son and daughter that Damayantī hoped to recognize in Bāhuka the father of her children. She sent them to him The tide of blood rose full in his heart. He rushed towards the children, and, with tears gushing forth, seized them in his arms After giving free vent to his burning emotion, he turned towards Kesini: "These two children, beautiful lady," he excused himself to her, "resemble perfectly my own two, that was why I wept on seeing them."

Thus did Damayantī discover her husband. She felt an irresistible desire to see and to speak to him; and her parents allowed her to have Bāhuka conducted to her apartments. She was dressed in the red garment of penance. She was stained

with dirt, as on the day when she had been forsaken. Nala burst into tears on seeing her. She shared in his emotion, but in the midst of her tears, she said to him : " Hast thou seen, Bāhuka, a man, who, knowing what duty is, yet went away, leaving a woman asleep in the forest ? This innocent woman, his well-beloved, his wife, overwhelmed with fatigue—who could have left her in the wood, if not Nala ? Yet, what offence have I committed against him since my infancy, which should make him leave me while asleep in the forest ? He, whom I chose publicly, in preference to the gods, to whom I was devoted, whom I loved, the father of my children—how could he have left me ? Over the sacred fire he took my hand, and in the presence of the gods said to me · ' I shall be faithful to thee.' It was the truth that he was professing to vow then to me ; where is that truth now ? " Nala exonerated himself, and laid the blame of his faults on his evil genius. But was it for Damayantī to remind him of their wedding day, when she was preparing to choose a new husband ? Bending down and touching the feet of the guilty Nala, it was now the turn of that irreproachable woman to protest her innocence. The announcement of her Swayambara was only an artifice designed to bring back her husband to Damayantī, who could live no longer without him.

And the gods, whose testimony she invoked, answered for her fidelity to Nala

Bāhuka, remembering the king of the Nāgas, now put on the celestial robe that the monarch had given him ; and Damayantī saw once more a young and beautiful Nala standing before her. With a loud cry of joy she rushed into her husband's arms ; and he, covering both his children with kisses, let Damayantī draw him to her ; and the exile's head rested upon her heart For a long time did both husband and wife weep in each other's arms.

Nala returned alone to his former kingdom, for he had his revenge to take. This time, assured of success, he played Damayantī and his new riches against Pushkara. His brother staked the empire.

Pushkara, whom Kali no longer helped, lost all that he had obtained by fraud. The generous Nala pardoned his brother, and once more took his seat upon his throne, which only the love and fidelity of a woman had enabled him to ascend once

more. This he understood, and it was with royal pomp that he made her re-enter the kingdom that she had quitted before in misery, as she followed an unhappy and guilty husband.

By piety, firmness, and patience in adversity, can man, not only conquer misfortune, but also force back death itself. Yudhisthira, after having learnt from the history of Nala, an unfortunate player like himself, to hope for rehabilitation after guilt, and for good fortune after misery, the Brāhman Mārkandēya related to him the legend of Sāvitrī. " Listen, O king," said he, " to the story of the perfect happiness and unheard-of good fortune to which the most virtuous of women might desire to attain, and which were attained by Sāvitrī, the royal maiden." [1]

There was once a king of Madra. Though faithfully observant of religious duties, he had yet been childless for a long time, but at last had a daughter born to him, as the worthy reward of a virtuous life. She was named Sāvitrī, after the goddess who had presided at her birth.[2] When she arrived at womanhood, all the virtues of her sex revealed themselves in her, and the men used to murmur as she passed by: " She is almost as beautiful as a daughter of the gods ! " But there ended the triumph of the young virgin · neither her radiant beauty, nor her virtues, nor her firm character, had attracted suitors for her hand.

One day she entered the domestic temple, and after sacrificing to the goddess of Fire, she had a long conversation with the Brāhmans. Then, gathering up the flowers that had been consecrated to the gods, she went to her father and laid down at the feet of the old man the perfumed offering which the Immortals had accepted Aswapati looked at her with a feeling of fatherly pride mingled with sadness. Nobody had sought the hand of the divinely beautiful virgin, and the law of Manu was so severe against the father who did not provide for his daughter in marriage ! Oh, that the responsibility of such a misfortune could for ever depart from Aswapati ! Let Sāvitrī choose for herself a husband who should be equal to

[1] *Sāvitri*, episode from the Mahābhārata, translated from Sanskrit into French by M G. Pauthier Paris, Curmer, 1841 (This work forms part of the collection entitled *The Pleides* ) Thanks to this version, our literature possesses the episode of Sāvitrī with its charming and austere grace.

[2] Sāvitrī is a Vedic prayer personified. It was addressed to Savitri, the Sun, considered as the creator of beings.

herself in virtue, and the king of Madra would bless their marriage. Agitated and blushing, the young girl fell down at her father's feet. "Go," he said to her. And she went, and left the shelter of a mother's wing to seek for a husband's protection.

She mounts a golden chariot, accompanied by her father's oldest councillors. "Where will she go?" eloquently asks her modern historian. "To the palaces of kings, rich, valiant and renowned? No; but to the forest solitudes where, practising all the rigours of asceticism, the rājarshis, kings, who, renouncing the world in old age, have gained the religious sanctuary of the woods, to prepare for their final deliverance." [1]

Into those solitudes, where nature holds her sway against man, to which anchorites retire, more or less crushed by those conflicts which mortals ever have to endure, thither will Sāvitrī retire, and there will she live, forgetting the present and living in eternity.

After having honoured the Brāhmans with homage and gifts, and visited the holy tīrthas, the austere virgin returned to her paternal home

Nārada, the divine sage, was with Aswapati when Sāvitrī returned. She touched their feet with her forehead and waited for them to question her Aswapati anxiously prayed her to tell him, as well as Nārada, the results of her journey.

"There was in Sālwa," then said Sāvitrī, "a king full of all virtue, named Dyumatsēna, who was becoming blind through age. In this sad condition of blindness, this father of an adolescent son, young, yet always engaged in search of wisdom, was robbed of his kingdom by an old enemy, his neighbour. Upon that he retired into the forest with his wife, the mother of the youth; and, arrived in the great desert, he observes unceasingly harsh austerities in order to fulfil a great vow.

"His son, born in the town of Sālwa, and grown up in the forest of Penitents, is named Satyavān, the *truthful young man*, whose form resembles my own. 'May he become my husband!' I said to myself; for that is the choice of my heart."

"O, what misery! what misery!" exclaimed Nārada.

What did that exclamation mean? Was Sāvitrī's choice reprehensible? Was he to whom she was united by that

[1] *Parallèle d'un épisode de l'ancienne poésie indienne avec des poèmes de l'antiquité classique*, by A. Ditandy, Paris, 1856.

mysterious relationship of heart, equalling the ties of blood, was he unworthy of the royal virgin? No, for in the handsome Satyavān were united the ascetic virtues of the Brāhman and the generous instincts of the Kshattriya. But a funereal veil covered the admirable portrait of the young anchorite described by Nārada. In a year's time, at that same hour, Satyavān was to die.

"Go, Sāvitrī," said the king of Madra to his daughter, "go, my lovely one, make another choice. The young man thou hast chosen has only one fault, against all his qualities; as the well-beloved Nārada, comparable to the gods, has just told me, in a year's time, this young man, having attained the term of his life, will lose his mortal form."

Sāvitrī remained unmoved, and her stern voice uttered the following oath without faltering: "*Only once* can we submit to destiny; a young girl marries *only once*; *only once* can her father say to her: '*I give thee*!' Those are the three 'only once' in the life of good people. Let him have a long life or a short one, let him be gifted with virtues, or let him be devoid of them, once I have chosen a husband I do not choose a second time; once my mind has formed a resolution my words respond to it; this, my resolution, is next to be carried out by my actions, of which my judgment is the arbiter."

In the above speech we find a type, doubtless unique in Indian society, where the complete surrender of woman's own will was her continual duty. Sāvitrī obeyed the idea, consecrated by her reason, with cold, unyielding perseverance She united with courage to undertake, the firmness to accomplish her design. Here was an individuality made powerful by her belief in her own strength.

"Firm is the mind of Sāvitrī," said Nārada, approving of the union, on which she had decided

The king was silenced by this act of self-consecration, and with a blessing acceded to his daughter's desire He performed, with the assistance of the Brāhmans, a sacrifice that would ensure Sāvitrī's happiness, and conducted her, his only child, to the forest of Medhya, where dwelt the blind hermit who once had been a king

The two families met The anchorite, seated at the foot of a tree, received the homage of his royal visitor, and offered

him the argha, that basket of fruit and aliments which is given to the guest as a token of honour. "What is the object of thy visit? Why hast thou come here?" demanded the rājarshi of the king of Madra.

And Aswapati, having expressed his wishes, presented his daughter to him, saying: "Here is my Sāvitrī, my beautiful young daughter, O royal sage; for her virtues, take her to be thy daughter, O thou who art gifted with all virtue!"

But the anchorite replied to him with an expression of doubt: "Deprived of our kingdom, exiled to the woods, we practise the duties of an austere penitence. How could thy daughter, worthy of living in a superb palace, endure the privations and austerities of this hermitage?"

"Both my daughter and I," said the pious Aswapati, "have already known both pleasure and pain, possession and privation; it is unbecoming to address such words of reproach to me. I am come to ask for thy son, O prince, in a spirit of firm resolution. Thou oughtest not to destroy my hope, mine, who am come to salute thee in all friendliness; thou canst not send me away thus, me, who have come to thee in all affection. Thou oughtest to be my equal and my kinsman by marriage, as I wish to be thine; take then my daughter as thy daughter-in-law, that she may become the spouse of the excellent Satyavān"

That was, in secret, the dearest wish of Dyumatsēna, the dethroned king. Satyavān and Sāvitrī were married in the presence of the holy inmates of the hermitage; and Aswapati, assured of his daughter's happiness, returned satisfied to his palace, now no longer lighted up by Sāvitrī's youthful presence

After the father's departure, the newly married wife divested herself of her princely ornaments, and put on the valkala Her modesty, her engaging graces, her self-control, won for her the sympathy of the Brāhmans who gathered round the royal hermit The exquisite attention she paid to her person, a habit she had not laid aside with her beautiful robes, charmed her mother-in-law, whilst her piety and her conversation were the pride of her father-in-law

The serenity of her soul, her harmonious voice, always giving utterance to pure and sweet thoughts, and, above all, what the poet gracefully calls "the little attentions of life"—all these combined qualities and charms made happy the husband

whom she had chosen, and whose last days she wished to brighten. But she who shed so much joy around her, suffered continual anguish of heart within herself. Each day and each hour brought nearer the fatal term of life that Nārada had indicated. She locked the anguish in her own bosom, depriving herself of the consolation of sharing it with those who surrounded her.

"*Four more days and he dies*" said she to herself one morning. Then, thinking that by prayer and penitence she might redeem her husband's soul, she made a vow to stand upright for three days and nights Like Alcestis, she sacrificed herself for her husband; but while the Grecian heroine suffered a sudden and glorious death, Sāvitrī suffered unknown to all, a slow martyrdom.[1]

Dyumatsēna, the father by adoption and the spiritual preceptor of Sāvitrī, rose and implored the young woman to renounce so cruel a penance, of whose motive he was ignorant. But she, ever firm in the execution of her purpose replied to the old man, in words whose sad meaning he did not understand :—

"Do not be afflicted; there is no cause; for I shall go through this penance · my resolution is taken, and its fulfilment is the object of my life." Dyumatsēna yielded before that immovable decision, and even encouraged his daughter-in-law to uphold it

Sāvitrī remained standing. The faint white rays of the dawn penetrated the shadows of the night. "*To-day is the fatal day*," said the wife . . . She sacrificed to the Fire; then bowing herself before her parents and before the Brāhmans, she awaited their benediction Touched, they addressed to the gods, on behalf of the pious wife, the prayers which avert widowhood. "Amen," said the poor wife with unusual fervour.

She refused to take any food before sunset And when Satyavān, with his axe upon his shoulder, was preparing to enter the wood, she joined him, saying: "Thou must not go alone to cut wood in the forest; I will accompany thee, for I cannot live without thee"

Satyavān hesitates. Since their marriage day, his young

[1] See the remarkable thesis of M Ditandy, already quoted, *Parallèle d'un épisode de l'ancienne poésie indienne avec des poèmes de l'antiquité classique.*

wife had not left the hermitage. Weakened by fasting and by the fatigue of her penance, how could she follow him through the rough forest paths? But she persists in her request. She is not suffering, she is strong enough. Let not her husband prevent her from accompanying him.

Satyavān begs of her to ask his parents' permission, and the young ascetic expresses her desire to them. Her husband is going into the great forest, and she cannot bear on *that* day to be separated from him. Then, the woods are in flower, and it is long since she had wandered beneath the shade of the trees. Let not her father- or mother-in-law deprive her of that pleasure. It was the first favour the princess of Madra had asked since her marriage. Dyumatsēna grants it, on condition that the young couple neither went far nor lost themselves in the forest.

"The young, the glorious woman, having obtained her parents' permission, set off walking joyously with her husband, though her heart was agitated."

Satyavān inhaled with delight the perfumes of the early morning. Never before did Nature appear so beautiful to him. On the water was mirrored the foliage, and on the level land were reflected the first rays of daylight upon the pearly dewdrops The peacocks proudly spread their plumage of many hues, and their screams enlivened the solitude in its festal garb Everywhere revelled life; in Sāvitrī's heart alone dwelt the thought of death, slowly approaching to rob her of her only love Nature seemed arrayed in its most attractive charms, as if to bid adieu to him who was looking on it for the last time. And Satyavān, turning towards his beautiful companion, pointed out the smiling spectacle that unfolded itself before them. "Only look!" he said in ecstasy.

She raised her eyes, dreading to see upon her husband's features the paleness of agony, and in his gait the fatigue of one who had arrived at his journey's end . . . But no, Satyavān's face was still animated with the colour of health, and his carriage was easy and natural.

Sāvitrī waited, divided between despair and hope . . .

Satyavān continues to gather the fruit to fill his basket, and cut the wood needed for the sacrifice Suddenly he feels fatigued, his head pains him and, leaving off his work and going to his wife, he says:—

"Oh, Sāvitrī, my limbs feel as if they were on fire, and so does my heart! I do not feel well, O thou who ever speakest with propriety! That is why I desire to sleep, O my beautiful one! I have no longer strength to stand upright!"

Sāvitrī silently approaches him; she sits down near her husband, and rests against her heart his beautiful head, now rapidly growing cold in death. The moment has arrived at last.

A being, a stranger, was before them; a tiara crowned his head, he was dressed in red, his face was bathed in light, his skin was dark and bronzed, and his fiery eyes darted eager looks at Satyavān. He held a cord in his hand. Sāvitrī rose frozen with terror. She rested her husband's head upon the grass, and bowing down before the mysterious stranger, said in an imploring voice: "I recognize thee for a god, for thy form is not that of mortal man; tell me who thou art, O the most powerful of gods! and what thou art come here to do!"

"Thou art devoted to thy husband, Sāvitrī," answered the apparition: "and thou art vowed to austerity; for that reason I will answer thee. Know then, O beautiful young wife, that I am Yama . . ."

It was Death himself.

Sāvitrī endeavouring to seize a last hope, said doubtfully: "Listen, O thou who enjoyest supreme felicity! It is thy messengers, they say, who usually come to take away mortals, wherefore art thou come thyself, O the most powerful of gods?"

Was it to be the part of a servant of the king of the Dead to fetch the soul of so excellent a man? Yama himself wished to render him this last honour, and this was the greatest consolation that he could bestow on Sāvitrī.

Then he detached from Satyavān's body the spirit that, according to Indian ideas, united body to soul, and received the impressions of the senses. He bound it with his cord, and drew it along to the Southern region, where was his kingdom of darkness. The widow could not remain behind with the corpse. She would rather follow her husband's soul, and endeavour to wrest it from the god who never gave up his captives.

"But Yama, stopping her, said: 'Retrace thy steps

depart, Sāvitrī! Go, finish the sacrifice for those whose bodily spirits have been raised to the celestial regions. Thou hast done all that was possible for thy husband; thou hast come as far as is permissible to thee.' "

Yama was not sending her back to her husband's pyre. The time had not then arrived when the personality of the wife would be so completely merged in that of her husband, that her life would cease with his.

Sāvitrī still followed.

"Where my husband is taken, or even where he himself goes, there must I also go; that is my eternal duty. I implore thee, by the austerities of penance, by submission, by respect for my spiritual masters, by my love and my devotion to my husband, by thy goodness towards myself, do not forbid me to follow thee!"

She will not attempt by tears or wailing to induce the god to yield. The young ascetic will address herself to his intelligence, in order to gain his heart; and in a succession of maxims, she shows the advantages of goodness.

Knowledge was not sufficient to make a man perfect; virtue alone is the best possession. for he who possesses it desires nothing further.

"Retrace thy steps," Yama answers her; "thy discourse pleases me, it is so brilliant, so elevated, so well thought out, so befitting the occasion; ask for any favour but thy husband's life, and I will grant it at once, O thou whom I do not slight."

"My father-in-law has lost his kingdom; he lives, deprived of eyesight, in a hermitage in the forest; may he recover his sight through thy favour, thou strong prince, like to the dazzling sun."

Yama grants the favour asked for. But the paths are becoming more and more difficult. Sāvitrī should retrace her steps before fatigue overwhelms her.

"From whence could fatigue assail me, as long as I am with my husband! Where my husband goes, there must I also go! Whither thou takest my husband, thither too lies my road. Sovereign over all gods, listen once more to my words."

And she tells him that so great is the power of goodness, that when once it has been experienced it can no longer be fought against; and that so sweet is the result of intercourse

with the good, that when once they are known they cannot be parted from.

"The words thou hast uttered," says Yama. "show virtuous feeling and sound reasoning. Such words will not be without fruit. With the exception of the life of Satyavān, ask for a second favour, O excellent woman! and I will grant it."

"My venerable father-in-law was formerly deprived of his kingdom. May he, as prince, recover it, and may he, as of yore, my spiritual father, never swerve from his duty; this is my second prayer."

Yama grants that prayer also. And now Sāvitrī must retrace her steps. Nevertheless, she continues to follow. She explains to the king of Death the meaning of his name. Yama, the *Conqueror*. He is named so because mortals follow him against their will. But benevolence, mercy, and charity are greater conquerors than strength, and enmity itself cannot stop them.

"The discourse thou hast delivered," says Yama, "is as agreeable as water to a thirsty man. Except, again, the life of Satyavān, choose a favour at your will, O beautiful one, and it will be granted at once"

"My father, the master of all the earth, is without a son, may he become once more a parent; may a hundred sons, the founders of as many families, be born to my father; this is my third prayer."

And Yama grants this fresh request of the pious daughter of kings. But let her now retrace her steps, for long yet is the road. And she replies: "The road is not long for me when I am with my husband, for my love for him is still longer, but as we walk on, listen again to the words I am about to tell thee."

And she comments again on two of his names, Vaivaswata, the *descendant of the Sun*, and Dharma-rāja, the *king of Justice*. But the reign of goodness is great too, for it wins confidence.

"The words thou hast just said, O beautiful young wife," replies Yama, "are such that I have never before heard equalled. I feel therefrom the liveliest satisfaction Except for Satyavān's life, choose a fourth favour and depart."

"May a hundred amiable sons, the founders of as many families, strong and magnanimous, be born to Satyavān and myself; this is my fourth prayer."

"One hundred powerful sons, courageous and valiant, the joy of thy heart, shall be born to thee, O young woman," says Yama. "And that thou mayest not experience too much fatigue, O king's daughter, retrace thy steps, for thou hast still a long way to go."

But Sāvitrī fears nothing. For what is there to fear for the good?

"The good always walk in the path of virtue; the good neither faint nor suffer; the meeting together of goodness with goodness is never unfruitful; the good never inspire fear in the good. The good guide the sunlight; the good bear up the earth by penitence and austerity; the good are the road or the way of beings yet to be born, O king. And in the bosom of the good, the good never wither."

She praises the joy of good deeds, the joys of generosity and holiness; for they are free from all thoughts of self.

Favours granted to human beings," pursues she, "are not in vain; the good deed is never effaced, nor the honour attached to it. In so much as mortifications and austerities practised by the good upon themselves are durable, so much are the good the saviours of mankind."

"The more thou speakest, O thou whose soul is endowed with all virtue and all grace! thou of the gracious deportment, so full of majesty! the more my deference for thee increases," says the stern king of Death, softened, "choose an unmatchable favour, O woman faithful to thy husband!"

He now made no exceptions. Sāvitrī understood the meaning!

"Thou hast not withheld from me," she cried, "the power of asking any sort of favour without an exception, as thou didst in the case of those already granted to me, O thou who givest glory! This is the wish I frame: *Let my Satyavān live!* For without my husband, I am like one deprived of life; I desire no joy without my husband; without him I do not even wish for heaven; I desire no pleasure without my husband; deprived of him, I have no wish to live. Thou hast granted me the power of obtaining a hundred sons and yet my husband was to be snatched away from me! I choose this favour: *Let my Satyavān live!* . . ."

She had conquered. The god untied the cord that bound Satyavān's spirit, and promised the admirable wife that both

she and her husband should live for four centuries, to which should be given the name of *Sâvitrî*. She then returned to her husband, and saw him still stretched upon the ground. She ran to him, and clasped him in her arms. Again she sat down by him and drew his head to her bosom, the head that death had touched.

When Satyavān revived, he looked lovingly at his beautiful companion, and anxiously asked her who was that black man who in his sleep appeared to drag him so far away. And Sāvitrī told him that he had been asleep for a very long time, but that the man had gone away.

" Thou art delivered from thy lassitude, O my well-beloved, and thou art sleepy no longer, O king's son ! If thou canst lift thyself up, look about thee, in this dark and gloomy night."

Satyavān gazed a long time at Nature sleeping around him; he was gradually recovering possession of his senses. He told his young wife how his head had pained him, and how he had gone to sleep beside her . . . How a black man had come and had carried his spirit to unknown regions. Let her, who had watched his sleep, tell him whether it was a dream or the reality. Sāvitrī, pointing again to the darkened forest, pressed him to return to the hermitage.

" Rise ! rise ! Salvation is thine ! Think of our parents, O faithful friend ! The night is dark, the sun's return to the east is not yet."

She made him listen to the scream of the jackals and other night prowlers ; the crackling of the leaves under the tread of wild beasts , and, in order to tear him away from that gloomy spot, the courageous woman said that she herself was frightened . . Satyavān despaired of finding the way to the hermitage in the dark, and Sāvitrī understood then that her husband was still weak. The forest had caught fire during the day, and one tree was still burning ; her husband could warm himself at the blaze

The idea of passing a whole night away from the hermitage alarmed Satyavān. And what would become of his parents, after waiting for them during these hours of mortal anguish ? He is himself stronger, for he suffered no more, and he desired to see them and bring them consolation. Formerly, the two old people used to watch over him, and used to tell him that they could not live without him ; it was from his hands that

they expected to receive sustenance in this world; and, in the next, the salvation of their shades and of those of their ancestors. And without them he should also die. Perhaps at that very moment his poor infirm mother was guiding the tottering steps of the blind king, in hopes of finding him, their support. He wept; but a dear hand wiped away his tears, and a gentle voice raised itself in pleading accents to heaven.

"If I have given myself over to penitential exercises," this voice was saying, "if I have bestowed charity, and offered the prescribed sacrifices, may a happy night be granted to my parents-in-law and to my husband! I do not remember to have ever deliberately said an untruthful word; and it is through this truthfulness that my mother- and father-in-law can exist to-day."

But he, thinking more of his parents than of the pious wife who had saved him, and who was now comforting him, begged her to take him back to his father and mother. He felt himself dying; and, before closing his eyes, he desired to have the last happiness of seeing the tears that they would shed for him. Sāvitrī rose; his weakness did not frighten her, for it was only a passing one. She lifted her husband up in her arms, and when he stood up, she lavished caresses upon him. He looked at his basket . . . And the young wife said: "To-morrow thou wilt gather the fruit; to-day as thou art still weak, I will carry the axe."

The part of heroine was now over, and, instead, there only remained the tenderest of wives, mother and wife in one, in her forethought and solicitude.

Sāvitrī hung up the basket on a branch, took the axe in one hand, and then, with a charming, graceful movement she placed her other arm round her husband, who supported himself against her shoulder. Once more she felt the beating of that heart near her own, which she had been the means of restoring to life. Beaming with joy she urged her husband forwards; he was now again strong and well, and stepped quickly along, pointing out the way to his wife.

The moon's rays were shining upon the palāsas,[1] and kissing the purple flowers. Two roads met near these trees, and the

[1] *Butea frondosa*

young couple took the one to the north that led to the hermitage.

In consequence of one of the prayers granted by Yama to Sāvitrī, Dyumatsēna had recovered his sight. But what mattered that miracle to him now? His first look had not fallen upon his son!

The two old people were suffering the anguish that Satyavān had felt would be theirs. They ran about in the hermitage, grazing their feet against the kusa, the sacred grass. The Brāhmans gathered round them and consoled them; and all, in the name of Sāvitrī's virtues, assured them that their Satyavān lived—was alive.

When the young couple returned, and the first transports of joy had calmed down on the part of those who had feared never to see them again, the Brāhmans questioned Satyavān.

Why had he delayed so long in the forest?

He could not say; he had suffered and had slept, and knew nothing beyond that. One of the Brāhmans, Gautama, apprised through his divine prescience of the events of the day, said to Satyavān :—

"His eyesight suddenly returned to Dyumatsēna, thy father; if thou knowest not the reason, Sāvitrī can tell thee. I desire to hear thee, O Sāvitrī, for thou knowest both the past and the future. I know thou art resplendent like the goddess Sāvitrī."

Then Sāvitrī related, with sweet simplicity, to those who owed her their happiness, the remembrances of that dark day, the approach of which had made her tremble, and revealed to them the favours that Yama had granted her

"The family of the prince of men, plunged in calamity, in the bosom of a dark abyss, has been delivered by thee, O excellent woman! gifted with virtue, given over to the practice of penitence and the mortification of the senses."

The next morning a warlike din resounded through the forest. It was the army and the inhabitants of Sālva who had come to look for their blind king. They saw him in the bloom of a second youth and cured of his blindness. They brought him back in triumph. Dyumatsēna, with his wife and daughter-in-law on either side, rode in a chariot, dragged by the people themselves. Likewise were realized all the

favours that the piety, constancy, and devotion of one woman had won for two royal houses.

In the dramatic history of the children of Pāndu, the episodes contained in it help to relax the mind, made tense by the tumultuous emotions of the principal action. They are like oases, filled with shade and freshness; like peaceful halts in burning deserts during long and painful journeys.

Nevertheless, still hidden in the epic itself, what grand types there are; not equal to Rāma, but worthy to succeed him; from Yudhisthira, the majestic king of justice, to Arjuna, the man raised to the hero! And amongst the wives, especially Kuntī and Gāndhārī, do not they even surpass Kausalyā as true, perfect, sublime types of motherhood? When for the first time the Pāndavas took shelter in the forest, it was Kuntī who defended before them the cause of the oppressed. When the Kauravas were preparing for the fratricidal conflict, which was to end in their defeat, it was Gāndhārī who begged them to prefer the right of the more generous to the might of the more strong. But, often, ambition is the moving power of Kuntī's conduct; there was weakness mingled with her virtues; and, as for Karna's mother, notwithstanding her magnificent conduct after the death of the son of the Sun, she is somewhat forgotten as the mother of the Pāndavas.

As to Gāndhārī, no shadow obscures her pure image. After her counsels had been rejected by Duryōdhana, she only breathed one prayer: "Where right is, there should victory be!" She only hoped that her sons might have the glory that follows as a reward on the death of a warrior, killed weapon in hand After the fight she pardons her nephews in the name of justice; and, in the name of charity, she consoles them, the murderers of her own children.

How grand is she in the "field of the law"! With what profound, yet saddened, look she watches the desolating scenes displayed before her! What religious resignation! What truth, again, in the explosion of her long-suppressed grief; and in that curse which, in the name of devotion to her husband, the voluntary blind one hurled at the god whom she made responsible for the misfortune which had overwhelmed her!

But what a change there is from Sitā to Draüpadī! That powerful individuality, whose distinguishing characteristic is pride and quick resentment of injuries. She knew not the sweetness of pardon. When grief abated, the need for vengeance arose. It was she who pressed the Pāndavas to strike her conquered ravisher; she it was who excited them on to that war in which insult to her must be wiped out in the blood of those who had scorned her; again, it was she who, after the death of her children, asked for the head of their murderer. And yet she is great too, this companion of the Pāndavas, who voluntarily associated herself with their miserable life in the forests; who, with the courage of the lioness, defended her honour; and who, in the day of the last exile, when the wives of the Pāndavas bid their husbands an eternal farewell, and allowed them to depart by themselves to the Himālayas, alone followed them on the great journey and fell dead before their eyes. What an admirable type of courageous fidelity!

After this vindictive, energetic, and passionate character, what repose there is in the episodes that draw the portraits of Damayantī and Sāvitrī. The one sweet and gracious, the other austere and strong; but both rising above the fear of misfortune, above the fear of death, in their devotion to those whose existence they had vowed to share! Damayantī represents love above all, and Sāvitrī, duty above all. If Damayantī had not adored her guilty husband, could she have followed him into the forest, pardoned his abandonment of her, and recalled him to her father's palace, where she could not live happy without him? Perhaps. But even if Sāvitrī had not loved Satyavān, she would still have saved him, only because he was her husband. Damayantī represents sentiment, and Sāvitrī, an idea.

Both are types of womanhood, such as Brāhmanism alone could have created. Whether the husband be fortunate or unfortunate, innocent or guilty, living or dying, he must be, in the eyes of his wife, *the supreme deity*.

Shall we analyse, from the point of view in which we now find ourselves, the Harivansa, the story of Krishna's family, the appendage to the Mahābhārata, to which it is very inferior? No. This work reveals a moral decadence for which certain parts of the Mahābhārata were already preparing the way.

Polygamy, which the Pāndavas practised largely and unscrupulously, was enormously increased under the influence of Krishna. By its means the castes became mixed, and the native nobility and the purity of the Aryan blood was adulterated. The ancient customs were in process of disappearing.

Neither among the shepherdesses of Vraja, who shared in Krishna's pleasures, nor among the sixteen thousand wives who lived in his gynæceum, do we find any individuality of character. And could any individuality exist in those seraglios, where jealousy and the love of pleasure generally characterize the women? We will pass, therefore, in silence over the legend of Krishna. As a god, we did not pause to consider his worship, and as a man, we will not consider his life.

We must now descend to the first century of our era, before we can once more discern some rays of the vivifying sun, which animated and warmed the first productions of the human mind.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE COURT OF MÂLAVA

*A redresser of wrongs*, contemporary with Augustus.
The intellectual and artistic rôle of women. Their language. Women, as palace officers.
The heroines of Kâlidâsa. The nymph Urvasî and the queen Ausînârî Sacuntalâ and her friends. The Sacuntalâ of the Mahâbhârata compared with that of Kâlidâsa. Final thoughts

ROME had arrived at that epoch of moral depravity which was called the Empire. By a strange and rare contrast, never had the separation between good and evil been more complete than in that century of superficial civilization, brilliant, yet corrupt to the core. The Romans worshipped no other god than Augustus; and the emperor had caused the triumvirate to be forgotten.

The Roman lyre repeated the accents that had charmed ancient Greece; she echoed these without feeling the enthusiasm that had given them birth. From the mass, abandoned to material instincts, Virgil's voice arose, serene and majestic, to sing once more the ancient faith and valour; yet one felt no longer, in the verses of the Roman poet, the religious and heroic inspiration that sustained the immortal epic of Greece. Man believed no longer in the gods of whom he sang, and the epic poem of an Augustan courtier could produce nothing better than an Æneid

Even when Virgil could evoke with charming freshness the scenes of rural life, he yet made the splendour of imperial glory intrude into the domain of nature. Horace chanted the poetry of ease and comfort in life, with that joyous grace which is the smile of reason Propertius, the tender and touching Tibullus, brilliant interpreters of the easy-going manners and morals of the new society, gave utterance in harmonious language to sentiments whose soft and voluptuous expression would have been disavowed by the rugged Roman in the noble days of the Republic.

All these poets,[1] in heralding the universal empire of Augustus, absorbed, in their dreams of universal monarchy, that far-off country sheltered by the chains of the Himālayan mountains and surrounded by the ocean waves. Little did the great lyric poets of Rome suspect that in the country of India, vaguely known to them by the reports of its luxuriant vegetation, there lived rivals to them both in poetic grace and in eloquence. What would have been their astonishment if they had known that the human mind was displaying itself in equal brilliancy in two opposite quarters of the globe at one and the same time?

There was reigning at that time in Mālava a prince who had the honour to give his name to an era of the Hindus,[2] and who is to them even still what the emperor Charlemagne was once to the West. The popular imagination, struck with their greatness, delighted in enveloping the deeds of both in a marvellous tracery. But, if of the Frankish hero we possess both history and legend, only the latter remains to us of the Indian. From legends alone we are reduced to reconstruct the type of the sovereign in whose reign the Indian mind passed through its last phase of poetic grandeur.

Courageous even to recklessness, generous even to prodigality, disinterested even to abnegation, devoted to mankind even to the sacrificing of one's life; a veritable *Redresser of wrongs*, rescuing women from the tryanny of some husbands, or restoring them to the tenderness of others; worthy, in a word, of being sung by Ariosto; such is the king of Mālava, the contemporary of Augustus, as represented to us in legendary lore.

In his court, even women were initiated into letters and art. To their talent as painters was entrusted the decoration of palaces, for those festivals which were, again, enlivened

[1] See on this subject of universal monarchy, revealed by the poets, speaking as organs of imperial politics, the very curious memorandum in which M Reinaud reconstitutes an entire period of Roman History on new bases given by the united testimony of East and West *Relations politiques et commerciales de l'empire romain avec l'Asie orientale* (Hyrcania, India, Bactria, and China) *pendant les cinq premiers siecles de l'ère chrétienne*, after the testimony given by Latins, Greeks, Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Chinese (*Journal asiatique*, 1863, Mars–Avril-Mai-Juin, 6me Série, T 1) " This Journal was founded in 1822, a year before the English *J R.A.S.*, and still continues "

[2] The era of Vikramāditya, named Samvat, 57 B C.

by their songs, their dances, and the notes of their lutes. It was to a woman that Kālidāsa, in dedicating to her his treatise on prosody, the Sruta Bodha, taught the precepts of the divine art of which he was master.

Nevertheless, it was a strange thing that the language used by women differed from that used by men. Instead of the learned constructions of the Sanskrit or perfect language, they spoke the Prākrit, the language of the lower classes, whose soft accents were easier for their flexible organs. We have from one of Manu's laws,[1] that this anomaly was in existence even in ancient times, and if the epic poems took no account of it, it was apparently because the grandeur of the subjects treated of, and the sustained style required, would not have permitted the blending with it of the vulgar tongue. But the drama, in its faithful and familar representation of social customs, preserved for woman, when on the stage she undertook the part of her own sex, forbidden by the usages of the Grecian and Roman theatres, the mode of expression habitual to her in private life

Like the courts of Lankā and Ayodhyā, the interior service of the royal house was entrusted to women. The functions of chamberlains were performed by them. Armed, they formed a regular royal guard.

Yavanīs,[2] was generally the name given to these female officers They were believed to be young Bactrians, whom Roman policy initiated into the exquisite elegancies of Grecian civilization, and who were placed in the courts of Indian princes in order to draw them, or to retain them, under the Roman yoke. They must have found a reflection of Attic delicacy in the court of Ujjayinī, where the *nine pearls* were then shining in poetic beauty, and adding their lustre to the reign of Vikramāditya But the brilliancy of the most celebrated of the jewels has eclipsed all the rest. The name of Kālidāsa alone is sufficient to immortalize one reign Of the three dramas attributed to Kālidāsa, two only are authentic:—

[1] "To persons, who, through ignorance of the Sanskrit language, do not understand the significance of the salutation accompanied by declaring the name, the educated man should say · 'It is I,' and so also to all women." (Book ii, sloka 123)

[2] By the name of Yavanas, Hindus designated the peoples living to the west of their country, first, the Greeks, then the Mahommedans, and, finally, the Europeans

*Urvasī, given as a prize for heroism*, and his masterpiece, *The recognition of Sakuntalā*.

It was from legendary times that Kālidāsa borrowed the names of his heroes ; but it was the customs, the manners, the usages, of his own age, that he embodied in their characters. Let us endeavour to find out from those ancient scenes, transported into comparatively modern surroundings, of what character were those women of the court of Mālava who enabled the poet to muse upon the ancient types he described.

Kālidāsa drew from a Vedic legend [1] and sacerdotal symbol the elements of his lyric drama, *Urvasī, bestowed as a prize for heroism*. Urvasī, libation, personified, in her union with Purūravas, the master of the sacrifice or the sacrifice himself, was the subject of the Vedic hymn. When this legend first inspired Kālidāsa, it had suffered the fate of all legends ; the idea had disappeared, the image alone remaining.

Purūravas, the second king of the Lunar dynasty, had wrested the nymph Urvasī from the Dānava who was carrying her off, and, thanks to his succour, the Apsara was able to see once more the groves of the Nandana. From that day Purūravas forsook the women of his gynæceum, and a gloomy sadness seized upon him. Would a nymph from heaven, an Apsara, consent to forsake the gods, and the ethereal regions, to share the life of a mortal here below, and to walk along the dusty paths of earth ? In the gardens, where he had hoped to find a moment of repose, everything spoke to him of Urvasī, from the amaranthus with its pinky hues, like the nails of the nymph, to the flower of the mango-tree, in whose burning juice Kāma dips his arrows. But, hidden in an arbour of mādhavis,[2] the Apsara was hovering invisible, and let fall at the king's feet a beech leaf on which she had written that, since seeing her saviour, heaven had become only another added torture.

Already had she shown herself before the eyes of the king, when a messenger from the gods came to call her to Swarga, where she had to undertake a part in a play composed by the recluse Bharata, the divine inventor of the dramatic art. And the king said, with an effort, to the nymph who was forsaking him : " It is not I who will make you infringe a command of

[1] Cf the *Rig-Veda*, section viii, lecture v, hymne I, and notes by M Langlois.
[2] *Bassia latifolia*.

Indra; but remember him whom you are leaving."[1] She remembered him so far as to replace by the name of Purūravas one of the personages in the celestial drama; and Bharata, cursing the actress who had dared to make such an improvisation on his own work, took away from her the divine knowledge possessed by the Apsaras. Indra made this curse sweet enough to her by exiling her from Swarga, and permitting her to choose, for her husband, the hero whom she loved. She will not therefore return to heaven, before Purūravas had seen the son that she would give him.

Meanwhile, domestic troubles had robbed the king of Pratishthāna of all peace.[2] In those gynæceums, it was with grief that the first of the royal wives would see herself threatened with a rival, and the queen Ausinārī, daughter of the king of Benares, knew that a woman could not fight against an Apsara. After having overwhelmed her husband with violent reproaches, she found in religion the strength to pardon him. She sent a message by a chamberlain to remind the king that, after the ceremonies of the evening twilight, she would come to him in the palace of the Pearl, standing reflected in the mingled waters of the Yamunā and the Ganges. In his presence, at the moment when the moon will be bathing with light the mansion of mother-of-pearl, with its stairs of crystal, she would fulfil a vow that she had imposed upon herself.

Purūravas, escorted by the female guardians of his palace, lighting the way for him with their lamps, went up to the fairylike habitation. The moon rose, and the king sent away his women, whose torches paled beside the rays of the star of the night.

It was not on the forsaken wife, who was generously about to come to him, that the thoughts of Purūravas dwelt, but on the nymph for whom he was ever waiting, and of whose near arrival he was yet ignorant. On an aerial chariot, Urvasī, covered with an enamel tissue of sapphires, embroidered with pearls, was at that moment descending invisible to the earth.

[1] The French is from the beautiful and poetical translation of this drama, given by the learned Professor of Sanskrit at the College de France, M Foucaux (Vikramorvaci, *Ourvaçi donné pour prix de l'héroïsme*, a drama in five acts by Kālidāsa, translated from the Sanskrit by Ph Ed. Foucaux, Paris, Benjamin Duprat, 1861, Act 2)

[2] "Town situated on the left bank of the Ganges, the ruins of which can be seen opposite to Allahabad"

She heard the king call her, and was on the point of discovering herself, when she saw a beautiful young woman arrive, dressed in a white cotton wrap, strewn not with pearls, but with the white flowering mangala; no diadem upon her head; but, instead her hair interwoven with clusters of the dūrvā.[1] Her retinue carried offerings. Calm and collected, the woman advanced, and the king gazed on her with respectful admiration. She offered the flowers to the rays of the moon, ordered the consecrated cakes to be given to the Brāhman, a confidential priest of the king, and to his chamberlain, and then addressed her husband.—

"My lord, may you condescend to approach me."

*The king*: "Here I am."[2]

She saluted him with the anjali and repeated her vow.

"I have taken, as witnesses, these two divinities, Rôhinī and the god of the moon, and I pray that the king regard me with favour; from to-day, whoever may be the woman loved by my lord, or whoever may attach herself to him and accompany him, she can remain with him without any hindrance from me"

Urvasī was listening . .

The king's confidant, mistaking the noble reason of this sacrifice, said to himself "When a guilty person takes to flight in the presence of a man who has had his hands cut off, and so cannot stop him, the latter exclaims perforce: 'Well, go!'"[3]

Then, speaking aloud, he questioned the queen with a hypocritical mixture of solicitude and astonishment. Would she then love her husband no more?

*The queen*: "Fool! even at the sacrifice of my happiness, I desire that of my lord. Judge from this, whether he is dear to me or not"

*The king*: "Jealous woman, you can give me to another or else make me a slave to yourself; nevertheless, I am not towards you, what you think, O timid woman!"

[1] *Panicum dactylon* "It would appear that the word Mangala is used to express both the white-flowering Dūrvā grass and the blue-flowering Dūrvā. The white variety is evidently meant here"

[2] Act III

[3] 'The queen is the guilty person (as he thinks), the sacrifice she offers is the cutting off of the king's hands—for it renders him powerless to punish her for her (supposed) guilt"

*The queen*: "Be it so; the vow of reconciliation with a loved one is fulfilled, as arranged. Come now, my companions, let us depart."

*The king*: "This is not the right way, to abandon him to whom one has been reconciled."

*The queen*: "My lord, the religious ceremony is completed." And the queen retires with dignity.

An instant afterwards Urvasī became the king's second wife.

The nymph led Purūravas to a forest that crowned the summit of the mountain Kailāsa. One day, in an unjust impulse of jealousy, she leaves him and enters the wood of Kumāra,[1] the god of war, a wood in which, according to the allegorical language of the poet, no woman could enter. By a metamorphosis, such as Ovid would have loved to sing of, she becomes changed into a woodbine. The king, beside himself, enters the wood; in song and with tears, he asks for news of his wife, of the cloud distilling itself in rain; of the lightning illuminating with fleeting light the dark depths of the forest; of the peacock, displaying its plumage, which reminds him of the nymph's hair interwoven with flowers; of the kokila (the Indian cuckoo) singing on the jambu-tree branch;[2] of the swan pecking at the filaments of the lotus; of the chakravāka,[3] the model of conjugal faithfulness among birds, restless, like the king, from anxiety when its well-beloved is hid from his sight amongst the leaves of the nenuphar (water-lily); of the bee imbibing the intoxicating nectar of flowers; of the elephant sucking the sweet-smelling juice from the branch of a balsam-tree that his companion's trunk pulls down to his reach; of the buck, with his doe lagging behind, impeded by the fawn that sucks at her breasts.

In the cleft of a rock, Purūravas sees a precious stone of a brilliant red sparkling in the sun, and picks it up, but throws it away immediately, for he cannot deck with it Urvasī's forehead. Then is heard a majestic voice, commanding him to pick up the jewel again, for its talismanic virtue brings about the reunion of those who have been separated. He eagerly picks it up, and in transports of joy addresses it thus: "Thou art very welcome, jewel of reunion! If thou canst

[1] One of the names of Kartikēya.

[2] *Eugenia jambolana*.

[3] Brahminy duck *Anas casarca*.

reunite me to the beautiful nymph who has forsaken me, then I will make thee the ornament of my crown, as Shiva did the crescent of the new moon." [1]

As he proceeds onwards, he comes across a liana and feels irresistibly drawn towards it. Why is he so touched as he looks at it? Is it because that frail plant, drenched by the rain, despoiled of its flowers, and so forsaken by the bees, reminds him of the weeping Urvasī? He approaches it, clasps his arms round it, and shuts his eyes, as if the better to picture to himself that he really is near his wife . . . At last he slowly opens them . . . looks . . . then faints, for the liana has indeed been replaced by his wife.

It was, in fact, Urvasī herself.

In their intoxicating joy, the husband and wife told each other of the pain of their separation; and the king fastened on the nymph's forehead the jewel which had brought them once more together. "Thy face," said he, "on which is reflected the light of the precious stone placed upon thy forehead, has the splendour of the lotus reddened by the rising sun."

*Urvasī*. "Prince of sweet words, a long time has elapsed since we left the town of Pratisthāna. Thy subjects are perhaps murmuring; come, let us depart!"

And the young couple prepared to depart.

*Urvasī*: "But how will the great king go?"

*The king*: "On a cloud, changed into a celestial chariot for our voyage, shining with the fresh colours of the rainbow and having for a banner flashes of lightning; thus shall I be conducted"

Many years had now elapsed, during which Purūravas and Urvasī reigned happily together, when a vulture flew off with the jewel of reunion, beyond the reach of any arrow that the despairing king could have shot at it The bird, however, fell, struck by an arrow brought afterwards to Purūravas, on which the following inscription was engraved: "This arrow belongs to the young archer, son of Purūravas, born of Urvasī, the destroyer of enemies" [2]

What did that mystery mean? for the king was unaware that Urvasī had given him a son.

A chamberlain then entered, saying: "Victory! victory to the king! Here is a woman, an ascetic of the family of

Bhrigu, who has brought a young man from the hermitage of Shyavana and who desires to see the king."

The king ordered the anchorites to be admitted, and they were introduced by the chamberlain. "There," said the king's confidential priest, "is the young Kshattriya, whose arrow bearing his name, hit the vulture he aimed at; he resembles you in many ways."

*The king*: "Yes, that is right. My eyes fill with tears on looking upon him, my heart is full of tenderness, and my mind feels calmed. I long to embrace him lovingly in my trembling arms, laying aside the dignity imposed by my rank."

He had recognized the traits of his own race in the lineaments, as well as in the courage, of the young man.

He saluted with veneration the ascetic woman. She told him that the child had, after its birth, been placed under her care by the queen Urvasī She was ignorant of the reason That day the young Kshattriya had disobeyed a law of the hermitage by cruelly shooting a vulture, and the blessed Shyavana had charged her to bring him back to his mother

Urvasī, to whom the king had sent a chamberlain to tell her of what was going on, now entered, and saw the king affectionately stroking the hair of a young man, her tears showed that she had recognized her son

But soon the tears of joy changed to tears of grief. The king had pronounced the name of Indra, and the Apsara remembered! Purūravas had now seen the son whom she had given him, the wife had fulfilled her task, and the gods were waiting for her Was it the end or the beginning of exile?

This was the mysterious reason to which she had sacrificed the joys of maternity. Purūravas understood everything, and felt a faintness come over him

"What a strange contradiction is destiny!" said he, on recovering himself, "now that I am full of joy on having obtained a son, I am suddenly threatened with separation from thee, his mother So does a tree, scorched by the heat of summer, and then, hardly refreshed by the rain from the earliest clouds—fall—struck by lightning!"

Disgusted with life, he was about to invest his son with the supreme power and retire into the depths of the forest, when there suddenly arrived the sage, Nārada, encircled with

dazzling light. He saluted the king, and to the homage rendered him by Urvasī, he replied :—

" May the husband and wife never be separated ! "

And the king, bending towards his wife, said : " May it be so ! "

Nārada delivered his message to the king. The gods had sent him to prevent the Kshattriya from laying aside his armour, for they still needed his assistance. To him, as to their defender, they gave Urvasī. As long as he lived, she should share his glorious life. The nymph was the worthy reward of heroism [1]

Kālidāsa in this work, lifts up a corner of the veil that hides from public gaze the internal struggles of the gynæceum,—dissensions in which the character of man always loses some of its dignity.

The attitude of the queen Ausinārī somewhat softens what, in these harem dissensions, might shock European feelings. Sharply and justly, in her double pride as wife and queen, she protests first of all against the painful position in which she is placed by her husband's caprice ; but soon her resentment calms down, and when we see her, in the name of religion, sacrifice herself to a rival for the happiness of one who had betrayed her, we are touched by her sadness, her resignation, and the dignity of her withdrawal. Urvasī, who participates of the nymph and of the woman, has the ethereal grace of the former, and the loving heart of the latter Like the sun's rays, she is ethereal, unseizable, but when her foot touches the earth, she becomes material, and interests us in the same way as any human being. By the introduction of this character, Kālidāsa's work, airy and sweet-scented like the breath of spring, unites, to the brilliancy of an Oriental legend, the dreamy charm of a Northern Ballad

It was an episode from the Mahābhārata [2] which, as we have said before, inspired Kālidāsa with his most delightful creation, namely, Sacuntalā, destined to be sung by Göethe in beautiful poetry, which we have translated into poor prose :—

" Wouldst thou express in one word the flowers of spring-time, the fruits of autumn, whatever charms and enraptures,

[1] For similar ideas, see pp 315, 330, and 334.

[2] See above, pt I, chap II

satisfies and sustains, on the earth and in the sky; that word is Sacuntalā, and it embraces all these."[1]

Like the episode in the Mahābhārata, Kālidāsa's drama opens with a royal hunt.

Erect in his chariot, bow in hand, Dushyanta, king of Hastināpura, enters in pursuit of an antelope. He has ordered his charioteer to give rein to his horses, and is enjoying the sensation of being whirled along onward by the fiery steeds, after the terrified and panting gazelle, destined soon to be struck down by his arrow. Suddenly a supplicating voice is heard: "O king! this tender gazelle belongs to our hermitage; she must not be killed, she must not be killed."[2]

Two anchorites appear upon the scene. Dushyanta immediately lowers his bow and stops the horses, the grateful anchorites point out in the distance the hermitage of their master, Kanwa, on the smiling banks of the river Mālinī The renowned, holy sage is then absent, but he has charged his daughter to receive strangers with due honour. Whilst the anchorites continue their work of felling the wood, the king proceeds to the hermitage

On approaching the sacred groves, he descended from his chariot, placing his royal ornaments in charge of the charioteer, for he would have blushed to have worn them in the abode of penitence As he entered the hermitage, he felt a convulsive thrill, which seemed to tell him that, in that calm retreat, Destiny would not forget him Suddenly from a neighbouring thicket rose the sounds of voices, fresh and silvery, and the king saw, tripping about in it, three young girls, proceeding to water the flowering shrubs with their pretty watering-pots.

"What an enchanting spectacle!" said he to himself "Certainly, in our gorgeous gynæceums, we should search in vain for such graces as appear in this blessed hermitage, why then should we not replace the haughty exotics of our

[1] "Willst du die Blüthe des frühen, die Früchte des späteren Jahres,
Willst du was reitzt und entzückt, willst du wass sättigt und nährt,
Willst du den Himmel, die Erde, mit einem Namen begreifen.
Nenn'ich Sakontala dir und so ist alles gesagt"

[2] *La Reconnaissance de Sacountalā*, drama in Sanskrit and Prakrit by Kālidāsa, translated by M de Chézy, Paris, 1830, Act I Is there any need to remark on the grace and eloquence of this translation? (See also *Sakuntala or the lost ring* by Professor Monier Williams and *Sakuntala*, Scott Library, published by The Walter Scott Pub Co, London)

luxurious parks by modest lianas of the forest, which throw them quite into the shade, both in colour and in ravishing fragrance?"

He hid himself behind a thick bush, and watched the beautiful gardeners. The three young girls emerged from the thicket.

"Dear Sacuntalā," said one of them, "one would really think that these young shrubs that deck our father, Kanwa's hermitage, were dearer to thee than thy own life to see the trouble thou art taking to fill with water the basins dug round their stems, thou whose delicacy equals the mālicā, just in bloom." [1]

The one thus addressed, answered: "What wouldst thou? It is not only to give pleasure to our good father that I take all this care; I assure thee that I feel for these young plants all the love of a sister."

The third young girl addressing herself to Sacuntalā, revealed by an expression of exquisite sensibility the goodness of her heart and the grace of her mind "But my friend, the plants we have been watering are just about to blossom, let us also water those that have already blossomed; our care will not be the less generous and disinterested."

"Well said, Priyamvadā," replied Sacuntalā, with redoubled solicitude for her beloved plants.

Dushyanta in his admiration for her sweet beauty and the charm of her movements, said to himself, astonished · "What! is that Sacuntalā, Kanwa's daughter?" Fearing that the bush did not sufficiently conceal him from the glances of the young anchorites, he looked for a more secure shelter behind the leafy screen of large trees. A mango-tree, with branches waving in the wind, seemed to call to Sacuntalā. She ran to it and embraced it, and Priyamvadā exclaimed: "Dear Sacuntalā, O do, I beg of you, stand still for a few moments in the shade of that tree!"

*Sacuntalā*: "Why! if you please?"

*Priyamvadā* "Because when we see you leaning thus against it, this beautiful tree seems to acquire still greater beauty, when thus clung to, as if by a graceful liana creeper."

A daughter of Greece could not have admired with more artistic sentiment the sculptural beauty of an attitude What

[1] *Jasminum zambac*

Sacuntalā's friend said aloud, Dushyanta thought to himself. The young girls, indulging in their country sports, continued their joyous chatter, when Anusūyā, the one who had spoken first, pointing out to Sacuntalā a honeysuckle, with flowers exhaling sweet scent, said to her with an expression of gentle reproach —

"Dear Sacuntalā, see, thou forgettest this charming mādhavī,[1] though it has grown up in the same time as thyself, through the care that our father Kanwa has lovingly bestowed upon both alike"

But Sacuntalā warmly protested against the indifference that was imputed to her. "Believe me I should as soon forget myself." She flew to the shrub and exclaimed in her joy and surprise "A miracle! a miracle! Priyamvadā, ah! how happy thou art going to be!"

*Priyamvadā*. "How so, my dear friend?"

*Sacuntalā* "See! this mādhavī is entirely covered with flowers from the root to the very tops of the highest twigs, although it is not its time for flowering."

Priyamvadā and Anusūyā ran up, and sharing her artless joy, exclaimed "Is it really so? Is it really so?"

Priyamvadā had in reality a very particular reason for rejoicing at that gracious incident, by which was meant nothing less than the approaching happy marriage of her friend Whilst Sacuntalā was receiving this officious news from her companions with her most disdainful air, trying to make her sweet glance look very terrible, and, whilst Priyamvadā was assuring her that the oracle, whose interpreter she was, emanated from the worthy Kanwa himself, Anusūyā said with harmless malice, as if struck by a sudden ray of inspiration: "Oh! that explains the zeal of our friend in watering this cherished plant! . ."

"Naughty girl!" replied in tones half scolding, half pleased, this charming daughter of Kanwa "this plant is as a sister to me, why shouldest thou seek for other motives for my care?" And while she spoke, she continued to water the flower that had won for her the prediction she seemed to receive with so bad a grace Dushyanta, well aware that marriage was impossible between a Kshattriya and a daughter of the Brāhmans, was already suffering keenly at seeing the dream vanish that he had

[1] *Gærtnera racemosa*

for a moment fondly harboured . . . And yet, if Sacuntalā was to remain a stranger to him, why did he feel so irresistibly attracted towards her? If presentiments were to be believed, no obstacle ought to separate him from the young anchorite.

Sacuntalā made a sudden movement of fear. A bee, quitting the cup of a jessamine, flew at her face, and the young girl cried to her companions to rid her of the troublesome insect. But both these smiled at her fright, amused at the struggle between her and the bee, and answered her quietly:—

"Ah! What could we do? Call on Dushyanta to help thee; does it not belong to the kingly office to protect the inhabitants of this hermitage?"

The king made a movement as if to approach.

"Do not fear . . ." began he, then checking himself: "No," he said to himself, "I should be recognized as the king; it is better that I should present myself as a traveller asking for hospitality."

Sacuntalā, flying from the insect, ran into the thicket and back again, but the bee still pursued her "Why!" she said, "it is still flying after me! O, for pity's sake, save me, from this annoyance" The foliage parted . . . and Dushyanta appeared "What! . . " he cried, with well-feigned astonishment and indignation, "who is the insolent creature that, under the reign of Dushyanta, a descendant of Puru, and the declared enemy of all vice, dares to insult the innocent daughters of the pious hermits?"

Surprised by the sudden entry of the stranger, the young girls felt discomposed But Anusūyā, pointing her finger at her timid friend, laughingly answered him who had so unexpectedly constituted himself their defender in a more serious cause "Sir, no one here is guilty of a criminal act; our young friend is only defending herself against an obstinate bee, that will persist in flying after her."

Dushyanta, respectfully approaching the daughter of Kanwa, who dared not lift her eyes in her confusion, said to her: "young lady, may your virtue prosper!"

***Anusūyā***: "Come, let us hasten and discharge quickly all the duties of hospitality to our guest"

***Priyamvadā***: "Sir, you are welcome! Go, dear Sacuntalā, to the hermitage at once, and set forth fruit fit to be offered

to our guest; meanwhile, this water will serve to refresh his tired feet."

*Dushyanta*: "There is no need for that; the charm of your speech is the most refreshing offering to me."

On receiving so courteous an answer, Sacuntalā's companions desisted; and Anusūyā invited the stranger to rest in the shade on a grassy seat, and, at his request, his three hostesses seated themselves at his side. Sacuntalā's silence contrasted with the unembarrassed conversation of her companions. The young anchorite felt agitated. Dushyanta looked with emotion on the three young girls,—sisters in love as well as in beauty.

"Charming ladies," he said to them, with the tenderest interest, "how well is this sweet intimacy that exists between you in keeping with your youth and grace!"

Priyamvadā, bending towards Anusūyā, murmured in her ear: "My dear, who then can this stranger be, whose features, so deeply stamped by calm majesty, and whose speech, so well marked by the most amiable refinement, both proclaim him worthy of occupying the highest rank?"

Anusūyā charged herself with the task of translating into words the feeling of curiosity that was preoccupying her, no less than her companions. "Sir! the gentle ease of your conversation emboldens me to ask you some questions; may we know of what noble family you are the ornament, in what country is there mourning for your absence, and what motive led you, whose manners all indicate a life of ease and refinement, to undertake a painful journey, in order to visit this forest, consecrated only to the harshest austerities?"

*Sacuntalā* (aside). "O, beat not thus, my heart! All the tumultuous thoughts that agitate thee so violently, my dear Anusūyā will guide and calm."

In reply, Dushyanta, hiding his origin, told the young girls that, being a student in theology and a subject of Dushyanta, he had been sent on a mission to visit the holy spots. Sacuntalā listened, and a warm colour suffused her face. Her companions remarked the emotion to which answered that of the stranger, and with a provoking mixture of simplicity and mischief, they said to their friend: "Well, dear Sacuntalā, if only our dear father, Kanwa, were here . . . !"

*Sacuntalā*: "And supposing he were here?"

*The two friends* : " Oh, doubtless he would feel that he could not honour his guest enough, unless he offered him what was as dear to him as his life ! "

While Sacuntalā sat silent and annoyed at her friends' indiscretion, they were, at the request of Dushyanta, giving their guest an account of her birth that made the king tremble with joy ; Sacuntalā, whose mother was the nymph Menakā, was only Kanwa's daughter by adoption, and in her veins flowed the blood of the Kshattriya. Sacuntalā vainly held up her finger to the malicious Priyamvadā, who was provoking the stranger to ask the very questions that he hardly dared to ask her.

" Ah ? why hesitate, so much, sir ? " said she, " do you not know that the first duty of a hermitess is to take a vow of obedience ? "

And when Dushyanta expressed his deep concern at seeing Kanwa's tender daughter given up for ever to the practice of austerities, Priyamvadā assured him that their father's intention was to give back to the world by marriage the precious charge whose guardian he was.

*Sacuntalā* . " Anusūyā, I can bear it no longer ! . . . I must retire "

" For what reason, my dear friend ? " asked Anusūyā, with unfeigned astonishment.

*Sacuntalā* . " I am going to tell our venerable matron, Gautamī, of all Priyamvadā's indiscreet talk."

She rose hastily and withdrew, notwithstanding the reproach of Anusūyā that she was disregarding the simplest rules of good manners, as well as the duties of an anchorite, in being so wayward as to withdraw from a distinguished guest Dushyanta advanced a few steps towards her as she ran away, and then confused by the involuntary movement, remained motionless. Priyamvadā running after Sacuntalā, held her back. " Thou triest in vain to be angry ; thou shalt not go away " Sacuntalā, as she turned back, endeavoured to kill her friend with a look, and, knitting her black brows, she demanded imperiously . " If you please, who is it that can prevent me ? "

*Priyamvadā* . " Ah ! Those two shrubs which thou didst promise to water for me ; must thou not discharge the debt of this promise ? Thou art free to leave us afterwards."

And she forcibly brought her back. The king, however,

touched at the sight of Sacuntalā's embarrassment, asked her pitiless friends to pardon her. Did they not see that the heat and fatigue had overwhelmed the poor child? Let their guest pay their friend's debt for her. And taking a ring off his finger, he offered it to Priyamvadā. Sacuntalā's companions read the name engraved upon it and looked at each other with troubled faces . . . It was the king's signet. Dushyanta, perceiving his mistake when it was too late, said that the ring was a gift from the king. Priyamvadā, refusing to accept a present whose value was doubled because of its august bestower, released Sacuntalā from her promise. "See, Sacuntalā, thou art free," said Anusūyā, "thanks to the intervention of this generous stranger, or perhaps of a noble prince! . . . Thou canst now withdraw"

But Sacuntalā remained. "Oh! I feel," she thought, "that this may be he who will share my life, if I am allowed to dispose of myself."

*Priyamvadā*: "What, Sacuntalā, thou hast not gone?"

*Sacuntalā*: "Hast thou not forgiven me my debt? I shall go at my own pleasure."

A sad incident now interrupted the scene, the charm of which Dushyanta was eagerly enjoying The royal suite were in search of their sovereign, and a number of cavaliers were riding towards Kanwa's house. A wild elephant had overthrown everything that crossed his path, and men, women, children, deer, had all taken to flight, whilst Dushyanta was deploring this misfortune of which he was the involuntary cause, his young hostesses, with the exception of Sacuntalā, begged him to excuse their hasty departure, and ran off to their matronly guardian Gautamī. The king resolved that his suite should encamp not far from the hermitage.

But would he be able to penetrate into the holy asylum which held all his hopes? The Brāhman Mādhavya, whose jocular spirit enlivens the drama with clever sallies, could only counsel his royal friend to have recourse to violence. Let him enter the hermitage, and claim, as king, that fifth part of the rice harvest, which was due to him as king

No, Dushyanta would not thus enter Sacuntalā's home He would not demand that tax of the pious anchorites; he would impose a gentler one, namely, that by their prayers, divine graces might be showered upon him Scarcely had the king

pronounced those generous words than he received their reward. He heard the beseeching voices of the two hermitesses. In the absence of Kanwa, the Rākshasas were troubling the recluses. Would the king deign to guard the sacred retreat !

Nearly at the same moment, there arrived a messenger sent by the queen mother, whom Dushyanta profoundly venerated, demanding his presence at the palace. The great fast observed during the offering of sacrifices to the manes of the ancestors would soon be taking place. Of these two equally sacred duties, the king chose the one which would bring him nearer to Kanwa's daughter.

He sent the Brāhman Mādhavya to his mother, and, fearing indiscretions on the part of the young court fool, to whom he had confided his dawning love for Sacuntalā, he begged him to think that what he had just now related to him was a purely imaginary romance Mādhavya assured him that he had no doubt whatever that the king had only intended it as a joke.

The king entered the hermitage as a saviour ; but he left it as a husband Giving to the young wife he had married according to the Gandharvic rite, the ring with his name engraved upon the stone, he said to her : " Spell every day one of the syllables composing my name and before thou hast finished, one of my confidential officers will arrive, to conduct thee to thy husband." [1]

After the departure of her husband, Sacuntalā, in deep sorrow at the separation, isolated herself from her companions. Absorbed in her grief, she did not hear the Brāhman Durvāsas ask her for hospitality He cursed her for the very sentiment that had led her to commit an involuntary fault ; Dushyanta should forget his love and his oaths, as if they were only a dream.

The young woman did not even hear the imprecation ; but the irritated voice of the vindictive sage filled Sacuntalā's friends with horror Anusūyā threw herself at the feet of Durvāsas and half-appeased, he promised that the effect of his malediction should cease when Dushyanta saw an ornament that would make him remember and recognize Sacuntalā. The young girls were reassured , did not their friend possess the royal ring ? But, though they promised each other not to add to the grief of the young wife by telling her of what had

[1] In the 6th Act, Dushyanta remembers these words

passed, they laid at the feet of the gods offerings of flowers, in order to turn away the misfortune that threatened her.

The intervening time fixed by the king passed without any open sign that he had remembered his promises; and when Kanwa arrived at the hermitage, warned by his divine prescience of what had passed, he tenderly embraced his daughter and resolved to send her to Dushyanta's court.

The young queen was about to depart. She had not, as she has in the episode told in the Mahābhārata, an infant in her arms, but she had in her heart the hope of approaching maternity The aged women of the hermitage congratulated her, and offered her baskets of consecrated rice She received their homage with respect. The matrons retired, and Gautamī alone remained with the young woman, whom she was to accompany The two companions of the queen's happy infancy now approached They placed an amulet upon her that should keep away all ill-luck, and lovingly helped to robe her. Sacuntalā's eyes moistened. Perhaps, alas! it was the last time that she should receive these affectionate attentions from her adopted sisters . . . " It is not good, dear friend," they said, " it is not good to weep on such a happy day ! " [1]

But though they spoke thus, they burst into tears themselves While Priyamvadā was regretting that the woods could only furnish the young queen with rustic ornaments, a young Brāhman approached A rich court costume lay on his arm.

It was the wedding gift of the nymphs of the wood When the young Brāhmans went into the forest to gather the flowers which were to compose the only diadem that Kanwa could lay on the queen's brow, a marvellous spectacle caught their eyes From the branches of a tree fluttered a linen veil of dazzling whiteness; from a plant trickled red lac, with which to dye the feet of the young wife ; and from the leaves came forth little hands like living flowers, scattering a shower of gems on the grass

*Gautamī* : " By this gift, do not the goddesses declare that the fortune of the king is for ever attached to thy person, and that thou goest to enjoy it for ever in his palace ? "

But how could Sacuntalā's companions, these rustic children of the forest, strangers to the elegancies of town life, how could

[1] Act IV

they deck their friend with these ornaments? Nothing was easier. Anusūyā knew how to paint; she could exercise her artistic tastes in elegantly arranging upon the queen's shoulders the white draperies, and in distributing the contents of the wood nymphs' jewel casket upon her forehead, neck, arms, and feet.

Sacuntalā rose, and was veiling herself when Kanwa entered. He was sad at the near departure of his child; but, through his tears his eyes shone with prophetic enthusiasm; he foresaw a glorious future for the royal race. The anchorites now entered the enclosure where were placed the consecrated fires. "May these protect the queen," was the prayer made by the sage (muni) while Sacuntalā was performing the pradakshina around the perfumed flames.

The moment for the separation had arrived Kanwa called the two young Brāhmans and confided his daughter to them; and these pointed out to the queen the way to Hastināpura. Kanwa, in words of ineffable sweetness, interpreted the feelings that were agitating the heart of the young wife, to whom at the same time he paid touching homage :—

"Divinities of this sacred forest, who hide yourselves from our eyes, behind the barks of these majestic trees, which you have chosen for your abode! She, who never raised the cup to her burning lips before watering with pure and life-giving water the parched roots of your favourite trees; she, who from pure affection, feared to rob them of the smallest flower, resisting the natural love of a young girl for this innocent adornment, she whose happiness was never complete but during the early spring days, when she loved to see them shining in all their vernal splendour; Sacuntalā leaves you to-day for the palace of her husband; she bids you farewell!"

What voice was that which arose from the depth of the woods to hail the departure of the crowned anchorite? Harmonious and melancholy, like the notes of the koïl, it replied thus to Sacuntalā's farewell: "May her journey be happy; may the thick shade of the great trees offer her, throughout her journey, a shelter impenetrable to the burning rays of the sun, may a gentle breeze blowing over the limpid surface of lakes, all covered with the large leaves of the blue lotuses, shake down upon her a refreshing dew, and may it lull her fatigue by its caressing breath; may her delicate feet

tread, during her peaceful journey, only on the velvety dust of flowers ! "

It was the voice of the sylvan gods, who had borrowed from the koïl, the guest of their woods, her touching voice and her melodious accents to modulate their good wishes.

Far away in the distance, a throne, the homage of a people, a husband's love, were awaiting Sacuntalā. But here, at the place of her birth, were remaining behind the companions of her youth, and the old man who called her his daughter . . . and she cannot leave them !

*Priyamvadā* : " Alas ! Thou art not the only one to feel the pain of such a parting ! See, in what a state are all the creatures surrounding thee ; the grieving fawn lets fall the darbha [1] grass from his motionless lips ; the peahen with drooping wings ceases from her light dance , these young shrubs droop earthwards their languishing twigs, and shed their faded leaves "

Sacuntalā, remembering then the liana that she called her sister, ran to mādhavī, and clasping her arms about it, hid her face in the cluster of white scented flowers that twined round it, and pressed with her lips the stalk of the shrub that had but lately announced her happiness " Cherished plant, encircle me with thy flexible twigs, like caressing arms ! Alas ! what long days must elapse before I may see thee again ! O, my father ! look upon this plant as upon my other self ! "

May her friends protect the plant Sacuntalā was forsaking ! And they both answered her weeping : " And as for us, unfortunate ones ! who will interest themselves in us ? " The young queen prayed her father to inform her when the deer, now dragging itself painfully along, would become a mother She now made a movement as if she was really about to go at last. But what impeded her ? What had rolled itself up in the folds of her dress ? She turned round It was the little fawn, whose mother had died at its birth, and which had found another in Sacuntalā , the little fawn that used to feed from its benefactress' hand on the grains of the syāmāca ; [2] whose blood she used to staunch when, with lips torn by the kusa, it would run to her, its natural refuge, that the hurt might be dressed. Sacuntalā burst into tears, and, embracing the poor little animal, entrusted it to Kanwa, the father of all the

[1] Darbha or kusa *Poa cynosuroides*

[2] *Panicum frumentaceum*

inhabitants of the hermitage. No, she would never have strength enough to go away. Then the muni sat down with her and their friends under a sacred fig-tree. He dictated to the Brāhmans who should accompany Sacuntalā, the words that they were to repeat to the king in his name. He gave the wisest counsels to his daughter. Even if she were the party wronged by him, she must never be incensed against her husband; she must be as a sister to the women of the gynæceum, and as a mother to her subjects.

Let her now give the departing kiss to her father and to her friends. Sacuntalā, throwing herself into Kanwa's arms, pressed him closely to her heart. Torn from him, who had ever sustained her, like a flower torn from its stalk, how could she live in a strange place! Kanwa showed her that she had an ineffable consolation in store for her in the future. When, already a queen and a wife, she would also be a mother; then would the kisses of her son make her forget her regrets for her father. Besides, is not every tie broken some day? Does not the moment come when man is to be separated even from his own body?

The queen threw herself at the muni's feet, who blessed her; then rushing towards her friends: "O, my well-beloved ones!" said she to them: "clasp me, both, in your arms!" As they kissed her, the young girls said: "Dear Sacuntalā, if by chance the king hesitates a little in recognizing thee, show him then the ring on which his name is engraved."

*Sacuntalā*: "Oh! My heart trembles at the very suggestion of the suspicion you mention."

*Both*: "Reassure thyself, dear friend, because . . . don't you see? . . . true love takes alarm at a mere nothing."

One of Sacuntalā's travelling companions urged that it was time to depart, and the queen, folding her arms once more around her father, asked when she should see again the sacred woods that had witnessed her birth. The recluse answered that, after many years, when her son, whom she would present to her husband, would be capable of handling the reins of government, then could she return with her husband to the forest, and there end, in contemplation, the life where she had begun it.

A few moments afterwards, and the recluse, calm, like a man who has fulfilled a great duty, brought back to the hermitage the two young girls, bewailing their companion.

Here ends the idyll, and now the drama begins.

The effect of Durvāsas' curse was not long in making itself felt. Sacuntalā, and the anchorites who accompanied her, are now in the king's presence. In a scene not less pathetic, but not so majestic as in the one quoted in sketching the Mahābhārata, Sacuntalā is described as being unrecognized, treated as an adventuress, repulsed by her husband. Then she remembers the mysterious words of her friends, and prepares to show the royal ring to the perjuror . . . But—the ring, the only testimony to her marriage—she has lost it ! Perhaps by another token of remembrance, an immaterial one, she could recall to the king the first hours of their married life.

" Dost thou not remember the day when, under the shade formed by the flexible branches of the vetasa,[1] thou tookest in the hollow of thy hand, the limpid water from the cup of a brilliant lotus ? "

*Dushyanta* : " Well, well ! and then ? "

*Sacuntalā* : " At that moment, the child of my adoption, my little favourite fawn, was near me : 'Drink first ! ' thou saidst to it, and heldest out thy hand ; but it was not yet accustomed to thee, and dared not drink, though it did not hesitate to do so from my own hand ; upon which thou didst exclaim smiling : 'Truly one only trusts one's own—those whom they know, and you two are the inhabitants of the same wood and know each other.' "[2]

Dushyanta, regarding her recital as if it were a pleasant fiction, remained unmoved. He laughed at her indignation, and was not touched by her tears.

Sacuntalā has not here that energetic and proud bearing which makes the woman so imposing in the earlier story, and softens what there is singular in her situation. Equally repulsed by her husband and by the mandatories of her father, she must obey the orders of the latter, and remain with the man who has despised her ; for was he not her husband ? A Brāhman, touched with pity, was just going to receive her into his own house until the mystery could be cleared up, when what seemed a woman took her in her arms and flew up with her into the skies. It was her mother, the Apsara, Menakā. And the king, whose astonishment this last incident redoubled, said : " In

[1] *Calamus rotang*

[2] Act V.

spite of all my efforts, I cannot remember to have taken, as my wife, the charming daughter of Kanwa, and yet, my heart, torn by doubts, seems to tell me it must be so."

The royal ring, dropped unawares by Sacuntalā into a holy tank during her ablutions, had been found by a fisherman in the body of a fish. The jewel was taken to the king, and the husband then remembered all! He remembered now, *after* he had sent Sacuntalā away! He remembered now, when she might be lost to him for ever! No more happiness and repose for him now! Adieu even to the springtime festival, when the virgins, after shaking them down from the branches of the trees, offered to Kāma the first flowers that adorn Nature when she casts off her weeds! The nymph, Misrakesī, whom Sacuntalā had employed to spy out the real sentiments of Dushyanta, started with joy at the sight of that melancholy sadness in which the king's grief had plunged Hastināpura.

She watched how Dushyanta, pale, emaciated, searched everywhere for some token of remembrance of his wife, and how he had penetrated behind the mādhavīs where he expected to find a picture sketched by himself, and painted by one of his slaves, which represented his first interview with Sacuntalā. She heard how he recalled the painful remembrance of that scene, in which the pure and gentle creature, repulsed by him with scornful raillery, indignantly abandoned by those to whom her father had entrusted her, had gazed on him for the last time with imploring, tearful eyes He should never forget that look, and the remembrance of it was killing him.

Misrakesī saw a slave enter the verdant arbour where the king then was: "Prince," said the woman to him, "here is the queen's portrait." Yes, it was really she; at last has Dushyanta seen her again. "Could not one say that her eyes search for me, those eyes again in which shines such tender affection? . . . See, she smiles; she is about to speak!" The king, however, was not quite satisfied with his work, and ordered the slave to fetch his pencils; the latter asked Mādhavya to hold the portrait meanwhile; but Dushyanta, with a movement of jealous tenderness, exclaimed: "No, no! It is I who must undertake that task." Dushyanta had chosen the moment when Sacuntalā was flying from the bee that was pursuing her. But how many details were wanting to the scene! The royal artist was desirous of drawing, in the distant

background, one of the Himālayan peaks; where eternal ice, standing out against the blue sky, reflects the fires of an intense light. The chāmaras. those white yaks of Thibet, would be wandering over the mountain. In the middle distance would the Mālinī, strewn with sand-banks, and dotted with swans furrowing its waters, wind through vegetation on both sides. In the foreground would be a tree spreading its rich foliage, a couple of deer sheltering under its branches, hung with the bark garments of the penitents to dry. The lively Mādhavya thought that the picture would be infinitely more picturesque if some stern figures of the old anchorites could form a contrast to the gracious beauty of the young gardeners.

Sacuntalā's husband did not confine his touching up of the picture to the landscape only. A pretty ornament was wanting to Kanwa's daughter; those perfumed ear-rings, clusters of the sirīsha,[1] caressing her delicate complexion with their silky tufts. Under the magnetic influence of the memories evoked by the picture, Dushyanta thought that the dream was a reality, the picture the real scene; and was in despair when the illusion was wrested from him.

A woman, one of the palace officers, Vetravatī, placed before him a report from one of his ministers. One of his subjects having died, leaving no children, his fortune of several millions had lapsed to the king. The king's sadness increased. To die without children, and not to survive in an heir of his own blood! And when Dushyanta asked Vetravatī if none of the wives of this man had given him any hope of posterity, she answered that one of the former was expecting soon to be a mother. Thereupon he bestowed upon the infant soon to be born, all the treasures of which he was the legal possessor, and sent word to the people by Vetravatī, that to each of his subjects he would stand in the place of the relative they might lose.

While the people were receiving with acclamations the sovereign's noble promise, he was himself plunged in bitter reflection. He, also, would die without children, and he had rejected her who had already become a mother . . . Burning tears bathed his noble face . . . Thus his race would end with him, and, with that, the salvation of his ancestors! At that thought he fell fainting to the ground. The nymph, Misrakesī,

[1] *Acacia sirisa.*

having nothing more to report to Sacuntalā, darted up again to the sky.

Mātalī, the conductor of Indra's chariot, came to rouse the king from his languor by claiming for the god his help against the Dānavas. Dushyanta felt his heroic instincts waken up afresh, and by his bravery he was able to render secure the power of the beneficent principles of Nature. At the beginning of this last act, we find him descending from Swarga in Indra's chariot, contemplating with religious emotion the greatness of this universe, compared with which the earth seemed but an atom. He stopped at last on the summits of the Himālayas. It was there, that Kasyapa and Aditi, parents alike of gods and men, lived; and the king wished to lay at their feet his homage.

Suddenly he felt the same convulsive thrill as when he had entered Kanwa's hermitage for the first time; and yet he could expect nothing now of the kind . . . The voice of a young girl sounded afar off. "Well," said this voice, "canst thou not remain still? . . . Oh, how many proofs he gives in everything of a wayward character, the little one!" Surprised, Dushyanta said to himself: "Certainly, not in such a place, would one expect to hear of thoughtlessness and disobedience prevailing. Who, now, can be drawing on himself such reproaches? I must clear up the matter a little more."

He looked and saw a young child, who, having torn a lion's cub from its mother's side, was dragging it pitilessly along, notwithstanding the efforts of two young girls to make him let it go. "There, little cub," said the child smiling, "open thy mouth quite wide for me to count thy teeth." Dushyanta felt drawn towards that child—for he had no son.

One of the young women promised the little obstinate boy a beautiful toy if he would set the cub at liberty; but, the child wishing to see what was promised him, she went in search of a bird, a *sacunta* (vulture), made of baked clay and gaudily coloured.

*The child*: "Well, whilst waiting, I shall continue to play with the cub."

Dushyanta gazed at him lovingly.

"How this petulence attracts me!" And a sigh burst from his oppressed heart. "Oh!" he thought, "happy, a thousand times over, is a father who can lift up in his arms a dear child,

longing to hide itself in his bosom, and covering him all over with dust from its little feet; and can see, through the sweet smile that breaks from it for nothing at all, the dazzling brightness of its little teeth, pure like flowers, and can lend a ready ear to its little prattle, made up of half-formed words!"

At the request of one of the young women, Dushyanta tried to turn the child away from the dangerous play he was engaged in. The latter, who had resisted all the orders and prayers of his second mothers, obeyed the simple word of the stranger, and the king trembled with joy as he touched him . . . The girl was astonished at the resemblance between the little boy and this stranger. From her, Dushyanta learned that the child, a scion like himself of the race of Puru, had for mother the daughter of an Apsara, and that he had first seen daylight in the forest that surrounded Kasyapa's hermitage. But when the king, stirred by a vain hope, asked his interlocutor who the father of that heroic child was, she answered him severely: "It would sully my lips to pronounce the name of the cruel man who had not scrupled to repudiate without cause his virtuous wife!"

Her reply struck Sacuntalā's husband to the heart.

The other young woman had now returned, and, showing the child the bird that she had promised, made him observe the beauty of the sacuntas. "Sacunta-lāvanyam," she said in Prākrit. And the child, eagerly looking round him, exclaimed: "Sacuntalā! . . . where then is my mother?" While the two women were laughing at the mistake, Dushyanta, in an ecstasy of hope, waited for fresh indications that might enlighten him still more. Might not the name of Sacuntalā be borne by many women? . . And yet how much would he suffer if he had to renounce, as an illusion, the hope that was growing upon him! The child let his amulet fall; and the king stooped to pick it up . . .

"Stop! Stop!" cried the two women

But, to their great astonishment, the stranger already had the amulet in his hand. When Dushyanta asked them why they had forbidden him, they confessed that a frightful metamorphosis would be the punishment of any man, excepting the father of the child, who might rashly dare to sully, with his touch, the sacred object that the stranger had taken up with impunity The king, seizing his son in his arms, had given him

his first kiss, while the two women ran to acquaint Sacuntalā with what had just happened.

*The child*: "Leave me, leave me alone, I want to find my mother."

*Dushyanta*: "My son, we will go together to her; that will make her much happier."

The child, with one of those quick retorts which, on the lips of such little creatures who have not yet been taught to conceal their impressions, have such piercing sharpness, answered: "What sayest thou? Dushyanta is my father; *thou* art not my father.'

Dushyanta smiled: "Even this delicious denial confirms me in my hopes."

A woman, clad in the sad weeds of mourning, advanced slowly towards them. Her strikingly pure features had lost their beauty through grief, her hair was carelessly twisted in a single tress like a widow's. Yet, in her, Dushyanta recognized the joyous young girl who, dressed in her bark garment, had run amidst the flowers in Kanwa's hermitage; he recognized the woman, beautiful ever, who had come in her royal robes, to offer him the treasure of holy hopes and ineffable joy—whom he had brutally discarded. "Is this, then, Sacuntalā?" said he to himself, his heart torn by remorse, but burning with tenderness.

She looked at him, and saw that he had repented . . .

The child ran to her. "Mother," he said, "this stranger commands me as if I were his son!"

The guilty husband approached his wife, imploring her pardon, asking for a return of her love for him; and she, welcoming him in her soul with the title only given to a husband, confessed to herself: "Yes, it is indeed the son of my lord." She endeavoured to speak · "May victory . . ." she murmured, and her tears finished what she wanted to say.

*Dushyanta*: "Come, dear Sacuntalā! Though my name may be drowned in the flood of thy tears, thy wish is perfectly fulfilled . . . Yes! I augur victory to myself, from this thy forehead stripped of ornaments and from this pallor which has robbed thy sweet lips of their natural red"

The child asked Sacuntalā, astonished: "Who then is this stranger, mother?" And the young woman, daring not even yet to believe in the return of joy, answered him sadly: "Poor child! Ask it of Destiny!" It was too much. The king,

broken-hearted at the doubt, which he appeared to have deserved only too well, threw himself at the feet of the injured wife, and received the tenderest pardon ever uttered by a woman's lips. Why and how had his love for her come back to him? She wished to know all. But Dushyanta, feeling still too much emotion to awaken with impunity such painful memories, begged her to wait until the wound should bleed no more. As he wiped away Sacuntalā's last tear, she saw the fatal ring on the king's finger; her husband wished to restore it to her, but she refused; in her hands it had been an instrument of misfortune.

Mātalī interrupted them; he came to tell the king that Kasyapa wished to see him. Dreading to appear before the great rishi, Dushyanta prayed Sacuntalā to walk before him with the child in her arms

Then the scene changed as in an apotheosis. The great ancestors of the divine and human race, Kasyapa and Aditi, were seen seated on a throne.

The illustrious recluse introduced to his wife the heroic defender of the gods, and they both showered benedictions upon the young couple.

Kasyapa dissipated Dushyanta's remorse by telling Sacuntalā that her husband was not guilty. The curse that she had incurred had filled with remorse the mind of him who had pronounced it, and who, when he had regained self-control, had adored her and mourned for her.

After sending a messenger to Kanwa to inform him of the reunion of Sacuntalā with her husband, Kasyapa made the young couple again mount Indra's chariot, to return to their kingdom with their child, for whom he prophesied an august future.

If we compare the Sacuntalā of the ancient legend in the Mahābhārata with that of the drama of Kālidāsa, we shall find that this type, one of the most beautiful and most touching ever created by the muse of the Ganges, has lost some of its moral grandeur in the work of Vikramāditya's contemporary. In the primitive episode, Sacuntalā united to the lovable and chaste grace of the virgin, the dignity of the woman and the majesty of the mother. She rose superior to the scorn that attempted to crush her, and in the name of duty she stigmatized the conduct of the perjuror who threatened her. When she

retired from his presence, it was of her own will; and her last look was not veiled in tears, but fiery with anger. The Sacuntalā of the drama, tenderer and more feeble, and therefore more touching, has, notwithstanding a few bursts of indignation, only tears with which to defend herself.

But what the episode had not given us were those virgin scenes which, like Dushyanta, we appear to see from behind a leafy curtain; those young girlish types, Priyamvadā and Anusūyā, with whom Kālidāsa surrounded the figure of his heroine. What amiable malice, what clever vivacity, what gracefulness, especially in their conversation! How they loved their Sacuntalā! They forgot their own selves, and appeared to breathe with her own breath. Will the love that unites girls together ever find a more delicate painter than Kālidāsa? What makes this work one of the masterpieces of the human mind is, that by a most rare contrast, it is the product and reflection of a century of brilliant civilization, and it has succeeded in uniting the exquisite elegancies of a courtly language to the fresh and smiling description of a virgin nature, and the true and passionate language of the human heart.

Let us stop here. We are finding already that sentiments, which still preserve their purity, and which find elegant expression during the century of Vikramāditya, are yet wanting in that moral grandeur, that supreme idea of duty, which are so deeply impressed upon the primitive works of Sanskrit literature.

This decadence continued to increase, until the day came when India, debilitated, corrupted by the Krishna cult, yielded to the enervating influence of Islām, and showed to what a depth of physical and moral degradation the most gifted people could fall, when once it had exchanged the yoke of duty for that of passion. In such a society what must be the position of women?

Yet such was not the harvest that the descendants of the Aryans ought to have reaped.

When from the heights of the Himālayas the Aryans saw, unfolding beneath their feet, the magnificent countries waiting to be civilized, with what eagerness did they long to enter them! They were young, they were free and strong, they had faith in the future. From trembling lips arose hymns of

gratitude and admiration to great Nature, which smiled upon them. They were alive, and felt themselves full of life; they had not yet learnt to lose their individuality in that great universal whole that they already were having glimpses of.

Woman, also, was preserving her personality before gods and men. Through sacrifice, she invoked the blessings of heaven upon earth; and mingled her enthusiastic voice with the happy and majestic choir celebrating in song the might of Nature.

As wife and companion of man, she excited him to those struggles that were to bring about the triumph of civilization; she upheld him in the paths of uprightness, and brought him back when he had swerved from it. As widow, she survived him, who lived again in the children who followed in their father's footsteps. Could the Aryans have ever foreseen that woman would one day, through her suicide, sacrifice on her husband's pyre that very existence of which they cherished the possession?

The idea of a universal soul was hailed by the last stages of the Vedic period, and in their words one almost seems to hear an echo from the Bible. But instead of symbolizing one Supreme Being, the great mover of the universe, their descendant dissipated him throughout the whole of Nature, in their eyes, God was the World.

It was pantheism, and it was one day to be fetishism

The object, then, of the Indians of the second period, was to preserve the harmony of the One in whom they became absorbed. Men, animals, plants, and stones, became the wheels of this universal machine, into which the transmigration of souls brought a perpetual mutation. In this concerted action, one word expressed man's special part; namely, Duty. And in this word were confounded the obligations imposed by caste. Greatness and abasement, were, as we have seen, the part of woman. She was honoured, for she alone could give birth to the child who would save his ancestors' manes and perpetuate caste. She was tyrannized over, for from her misalliance or her corruption would come the crumbling away of the Brāhmanic constitution, and the rupture of the tie, binding the dead to the living, the past to the present, and the present to the future.

As infant, when born, her birth was cursed; as girl, by her

grace and purity, she became the joy and the blessing of the paternal hearth. As woman she was deprived of the right to perform religious duties, but she imposed some upon herself. As wife, she was made to submit to her husband like a child; yet she counselled him as a friend. As widow, she was placed in dependance upon her son; yet she governed him.

But one rule she even went beyond. The law commanded her to identify her life with her husband's; she went further, and identified her death with his.

Ardent piety, spiritual and ascetic tenderness, complete abnegation of herself, unlimited devotion to her family, a boundless need of love, formed the character of such women.

But then, the man to whom she sacrificed herself, was very often worthy to represent Duty to her eyes.

Why are not the great characters and the sublime actions registered in the epic poems, better understood in these days by the people whose ancestors had made them bud and blossom? Why has not time ripened the fruits of heroic virtue bequeathed to them from centuries? They have shared the same fate as the faith which sowed the seeds of that virtue; they changed, they were disfigured, in measure as that faith changed and was disfigured. Where truth is, there alone is eternity.

It is Christianity[1] which must vivify by its generous sap the dead letter of the ancient Sanskrit traditions; it belongs to Christianity to reveal to the Indians, in their sacred poems, the germs of the sublime truths it was their part to propagate. The spiritual tendencies of their race have not sufficed to preserve them from the attack of passion; inaction has ruined them; belief in fatality has bent them under the hand of Destiny, which, in fact, has no power beyond that which man himself gives it. May the practical spirit of Christianity save them, and its moral liberty revive them It is not sufficient only to gaze heavenwards; the march which will lead to heaven must be begun and continued on earth. May this people seize the torch, whose bright light their ancestors saw; it will not only guide them to heaven, but will also light their way to it

This great work is reserved for the powerful nation in whose

[1] The late Mlle Bader was a devout adherent of the Roman Catholic Church in France

hands rest to-day the destinies of India. The regeneration of the conquered is the solemn ratification of conquest.

By women alone can the work of salvation be accomplished, and she must be prepared for her mission.

Already, the Indians have begun to understand that the cause of woman is that of civilization, and, only a year ago, the loved voice of an illustrious professor [1] announced that at Bombay and at Benares young girls were receiving such moral and intellectual instruction as could alone make them worthy mothers of the future.

Until now, woman has only exercised individual influences; from henceforth she will exercise a social one. Then the Indian will understand that, by the right belonging to a human being, the homage of his wife is due to Him who had endowed her with an immortal soul. He will no longer be for her the Supreme Divinity, but he will endeavour to make himself worthy of representing Him in this world.

And this part that woman has to play is beautiful also.

With a deeper feeling of dignity, the wife will be able the better to fulfil those duties that she has accepted of her own choice.

And when death shall separate her from her husband, she will no longer hasten by suicide the moment of reunion

She will believe in Eternity, and, in endeavouring to understand it, she will wait for it.

[1] M Garcin de Tassy, Inaugural Address at the Hindustani course at the school, both imperial and special, for living Oriental languages 1st December, 1862 (Compare the progress made since in the education of Indian women)

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